Promising Futures

A Call to Improve Learning for Maine's Secondary Students

Maine Commission on Secondary Education ✦ Department of Education

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Department of Education

Augusta, Maine

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LAB

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ANGUS S. KING, JR.
GOVERNOR

J. DUKE ALBANESE
COMMISSIONER

September 30. 1998

THE REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON SECONDARY EDUCATION represents a critical milestone in Maine education; for the first time in the State's history, a group consisting of some of our finest educators has undertaken a comprehensive review and analysis of the condition of our system of secondary education. This initiative, which is part of Maine's overall strategy to elevate literacy to a level where Maine citizens are among the best educated people in the world, is a key component of Governor King's vision for a high quality system of public education. Building on the current strengths of our public schools, the Commission has sought to bring focus, clarity, and insight to the challenges confronting our secondary schools, which, arguably have yet to receive the level of attention or the conversations about reform experienced by elementary and middle schools.

The secondary school years are a crucial transition time for youth – a time of extraordinary growth, change, and maturing that spans the transition from childhood to adulthood. The learning and maturing that occurs during these years have a profound impact on each student's opportunities for the future; indeed, the quality of each secondary school student's education has much to do with the course and quality of life as an adult. As a result, the findings and recommendations of the Commission, and our success in achieving the goals they articulate, are matters of the greatest public concern and importance.

I believe this report contains both the wisdom and pragmatism needed to reshape secondary education in Maine. Careful thinking and generous respect for the students and adults who learn and work in our secondary schools informs the narrative. For all of its insight, however, it is only as effective as our commitment to understanding its findings and recommendations, and employing them to help fashion our own solutions. To assist in that effort, the Maine Department of Education has established a Center of Inquiry on Secondary Education within the Department designed to engage secondary schools in discussions about their work and the recommendations and findings of the Commission, to provide information and support, and to help guide secondary schools and the systems in which they reside in efforts to improve student achievement and elevate student aspirations.

In closing, I wish to commend the Commission for the extraordinary quality of their work, and in particular, to thank the co-chairs, Gordon Donaldson and Pam Fisher, for their leadership and perseverance. Their vision of what secondary education might be, richly informed by the experience and commitment of the full commission, has resulted in an invaluable contribution to understanding and improving secondary education in Maine.

Sincerely,

J. Duke Albanese
Commissioner

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

WE WISH TO THANK THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE and organizations for their valuable contributions to the Commission's work. They have made it possible to begin the State of Maine's important journey toward a promising future for all present and future youth.

– ***Gordon Donaldson*** *and* ***Pam Fisher***, Co-Chairs

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PROLOGUE

"I should have worn the long sleeve t-shirt," thought Kevin as he stepped off the bus at Allme H.S. at 7:15 a.m. Indian summer had passed and early indications of winter had wandered in. Kevin hurried through the front doors of the brick, one-story building, joining the other 550 students in the school heading for their lockers.

Two weeks into his junior year, Kevin Stanley knew the layout of the school well. While he had only been at Allme for one year after his family moved back to town, the school routine varied little from his previous school and he had had little trouble adapting.

Kevin spun the combination of his locker and, after taking out two textbooks to make it slimmer, placed his backpack inside. Even though the locker combination had not changed since the previous year's tenant, Kevin had little concern about his belongings. As long as you didn't leave anything out, personal property was fairly safe at Allme H.S. Running late from his long bus ride, Kevin hurried to the first of his seven daily classes. Mr. Potter was already taking attendance when he entered.

"Hey, Kevin, do you think he'll give us a pop quiz on last night's reading?" asked Linda as Kevin slid into his seat.

"I imagine," he replied. "He has on most days so far, and he did for last year's class. I hope I do better than last time. I read it last time, but I didn't memorize all the names and dates. I'm never sure what he'll figure is important."

Linda shrugged, as Mr. Potter handed out sheets of lined yellow paper ripped in half lengthwise. Over the next 25 minutes, the class took a twenty question, single-word-answer pop quiz. Kevin did better this time, but barely passed. Mr. Potter finished the 43 minute class with a short recap of the major ideas contained in last night's reading from the U.S. History textbook and the giving of the next day's assignment.

"I think I'm getting better at guessing what he wants," commented Kevin to Linda as they walked out of the class. "By the end of the first quarter, I'll be able to skim the text and pass the quizzes."

Kevin's morning passed quickly as he moved from U.S. History to English, Chemistry, and study hall. While there was some variation in routine, most class time was devoted to lecture, questions and answers, and seatwork. Kevin got by with adequate grades, allowing him to stay in the general track when several of his friends had moved to the business track over the past several years. He sometimes wondered why no one moved to the college track from the general track, but he spent little time dwelling on the idea.

As the bell rang to start fifth period, Kevin settled onto a stool at a round table in the Art class. Mrs. Juniper was an icon at Allme H.S. She ran the entire Art department at the school and had done so since she arrived 23 years earlier. Business, general, and college track students mixed in her classes. Kevin had not planned on taking this introductory course, but having to fulfill a fine arts requirement, he had signed up for it instead of band or chorus.

"Getting in here was a lucky break for me," thought Kevin as Mrs. Juniper began the class. Mrs. Juniper mixed hands-on projects, the teaching of skills, and readings so that there was something for all the students in her classes. Kevin was not only able to read and talk about Art, but actively created, critiqued and reflected on his work. While not seen as one of his more important courses, Kevin often spent more time outside of class on Art than on any other class.

If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be.

Thomas Jefferson

After Art class, Kevin hurried to lunch. Third lunch wasn't as good as first lunch at 11:15, but it was far better than second lunch, which split fifth period into two 24-minute classes. Kevin hustled into the lunch line so he could have maximum time to socialize and eat. After getting his lunch he sat down with several friends.

"How was your weekend?" Kevin asked Sean.

"Not bad," replied Sean through a mouthful of food. "My uncle took me for a last fishing trip. We didn't do too poorly. I didn't do much of anything on Sunday. What about you?"

The lunch conversation drifted from fishing to a used car sale, then to last night's T.V. shows, and finally to a forewarning about an upcoming class. A few moments before the lunch bell rang, Kevin pushed the last of his sandwich into his mouth, mumbled a "See you later," and headed off towards sixth period.

He bypassed one bathroom with a bunch of kids hanging around, stopped quickly in a second one, and made it to French class with time to spare. Kevin, with French-Canadian heritage on his mother's side, enjoyed French class. Mrs. Lettellier worked hard to make personal connections for the students, an effort which did not go unnoticed by Kevin. While numerous students showed the lethargy caused by a hurried lunch, the class nevertheless went by quickly. Kevin hurried to his favorite class, Algebra II.

While the time of day had always made period seven drag for Kevin, Algebra II was uniquely different. Instead of one textbook in the class, Mr. Parker used at least three and regularly had the students conduct experiments and read out of mathematical journals. They often worked on issues previously covered in Geometry class (which had not made much sense then to Kevin) and often got into conversations regarding trigonometry. In each case, the work built on itself, helping Kevin to see that Algebra had real applications to things like personal finance and production engineering. The day ended not with an assignment from one of the three textbooks, but rather a single problem outlined on the board. "What do I know that can help me answer this question?" thought Kevin as he left class.

Kevin hurried to his locker, grabbed a few books for homework, and made his way to the bus. While Kevin wanted to go back to see Mrs. Juniper, Tuesdays offered no late bus. It was either this one or his father at 5:30. He climbed on board for the 45 minute ride home still wondering about period seven, a little dazed from seven straight 43 minute periods, hungry, and worried about his movie date on Friday night. ■

A CALL TO ACTION

KEVIN, LINDA, AND EVERY YOUNG PERSON IN THE STATE OF MAINE deserve a world class education. As our youth move into adulthood, they must be able to compete for rapidly evolving jobs and participate in our complex and demanding democratic society. Secondary schools – high schools and technical schools alike – face immense challenges delivering on our public promise to secure a healthy, productive future for each young person, for each Maine community, and for our nation as a whole.

We call upon all Maine citizens to join in meeting these challenges. The Maine Commission on Secondary Education was asked to study our public secondary schools and to recommend ways that they could better fulfill their mission. This document offers the Commision's observations and suggestions. Its impact on the learning of our young, however, lies in the hands of its readers: teachers, students, parents, school administrators, state policy makers, and business and social service leaders alike.

OUR CHALLENGE

The Commission found much to celebrate in its fourteen-month examination of secondary schooling in Maine. In comparison to other states, Maine schools are safe and small, financially well supported on average, and politically well supported in general. While Maine ranks 32nd in wealth and 15th in education spending nationally, we rank first in allocating our education dollars directly to the classroom.

We can document recent increases in student achievement on the Maine Educational Assessment and narrowing discrepancies between male and female performance in math and science. The graduation rate has risen to high levels by national standards, as has the rate of admission to higher education. Since 1983, the state has steadily cultivated a pool of accomplished innovators within the education community and nearly every school can boast improvement in some dimension of student performance.

But much more needs to be done. Student achievement varies widely from school to school, roughly paralleling variations in community resources across the state. Achievement also varies profoundly among students within schools, reflecting the existence of "two high schools: one for students in college preparatory courses, the other for the rest" (Maine's Common Core of Learning; 1990). Educators, parents, and students continue to recognize that too many young people, by the time they leave school either by dropping out or by graduating, do not possess the needed skills, knowledge, and attitudes for productive futures.

The Commission heard from a broad range of students and educators. They, in general, described Maine secondary schools that are academically focused but rarely exciting or challenging, social but strangely impersonal and sometimes hostile, orderly but ill-suited for learning, predictable but lacking application to life. These schools do not support all young people in attaining the skills and knowledge described by the Maine *Learning Results*. Instead, too many reward students more for being compliant than for being self-directed and informed, more for memorizing information than for using it to solve problems, more for following routine than for making decisions responsibly or for being creative, more for functioning in isolation than for being collaborative community citizens.

Why are secondary schools in Maine falling short of fulfilling the promise of a productive future for every Maine youth? The Commission offers two responses.

First, high schools and technical schools are asked to do much more now than ever

. . . high schools have accumulated purposes like barnacles on a weathered ship . . . The nation piled social policy upon educational policy and all of them on top of the delusion that a single institution can do it all. Today's high school is called upon to provide the services and transmit the values we used to expect from the community and the home and the church. And if they fail anywhere along the line, they are condemned.

Boyer (1983) pg. 57

before and are expected to do so within antiquated structures and on yesterday's budget. Consider that schools today, in comparison to the past, are asked to:

- graduate a higher percentage of students and to prepare them all for life in a rapidly changing global community;
- teach a significantly larger and more sophisticated body of knowledge and skills;
- incorporate dramatic and ongoing advancements in technology;
- play a much greater role in ensuring the emotional and physical health and in promoting the moral development of young people; and
- apply new and evolving knowledge about learning styles, brain functioning, and adolescent development.

Maine businesses . . . are becoming alarmed at the lack of competency in reading, writing, and mathematics of entry-level workers.

Maine's Common Core of Learning (1990) pg. 13

Even as they respond to these demands, schools have been expected to carry on the valued traditions of a bygone era. They are centers for community entertainment and identity, supporters of local ideals and aspirations, and more the celebrated end of childhood than a vital transition into the beginning of adulthood.

The second limitation on school improvement is that until now schools have not had clear and common goals. Maine's 1984 Education Reform Act changed policies and brought new services into schools. In 1990, Maine's Common Core of Learning broadly defined the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that all students should possess to be prepared for life in the 21st century. But until the Maine *Learning Results* in 1997, Maine schools had no clear "long range education goals and standards for school performance and student performance to improve *learning results*" (Maine *Learning Results*, 1997). The Maine *Learning Results* report states that each Maine student must leave school as:

- a clear and effective communicator;
- a self-directed and life-long learner;
- a creative and practical problem solver;
- a responsible and involved citizen;
- a collaborative and quality worker; and
- an integrative and informed thinker.

We now have in Maine a growing consensus that each school must not only promise to bring each student's learning to the high standards described by the *Learning Results*, but also to assess continuously their progress toward these results and adjust practices to make good on that promise.

AN INVITATION TO JOIN THE EFFORT

J. Duke Albanese, Maine's Commissioner of Education, charged the Commission on Secondary Education with the task of identifying how our secondary schools could grow so that every Maine teenager graduates with a promising future. Maine has never before examined its secondary education system in as much detail as we have. This report is the Commission's response to his charge.

We are well aware that the report itself cannot change our schools or, especially, our students' learning experiences. The adults who work in our schools, the parents who provide for our youth, and the local citizens who employ them and underwrite our school systems can and must foster these important changes. So, too, must the students themselves play increasingly active roles in their own learning.

This document, therefore, is not a set of mandates or requirements. It is instead an invitation to understand the need for change and a call to take up the challenge of school improvement. It presents a summary of the Commission's findings about the "current realities" of secondary schooling in Maine. It then describes six Core Principles which we believe should direct school, community, and state efforts to improve our high schools and technical schools. Next, and in most detail, it offers fifteen Core Practices for educators, parents, students, community members, and state leaders to use as springboards for planning and carrying out the improvement of their schools. Finally, we suggest how community, state, and professional leaders can influence policy and politics to support our secondary students.

The Commission cannot succeed alone any more than a few teachers or parents can alone change their school or community. We invite you, our partners in the schools and communities of Maine, to join in ensuring that every Maine youth knows and is able to do what the twenty-first century will require. We together can make their futures–and our state's future–truly promising.

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Promising Futures, pg. 5

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CORE PRINCIPLES FOR SECONDARY EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE IN MAINE

Kids need a place where they are known and valued by adults they care about. They drop out when they feel that "nobody cares if I stay." . . . Our structures don't let us tell kids it matters to us. We have too many kids and too little time.

Bill Ayers, quoted in "What Research Has Found About Small Schools" *Horace* 13:3 (1997)

SUCCESSFUL PLANNING REQUIRES THAT WE FIRST AGREE on basic purposes and values. The Commission developed the following six Core Principles to serve as its compass in this planning process. They reflect not only what the Commission believes is central to an effective education, but also what research and practice tell us. We urge educators, parents, students, citizens, and policy makers to embrace these same principles in their efforts to improve learning in their secondary schools. A short form of these principles can be found in Appendix A.

MAINE COMMISSION ON SECONDARY EDUCATION CORE PRINCIPLES

The Maine Commission on Secondary Education endeavors to create a strong and diversified system of learning for all Maine youth. The principles listed below acknowledge the unique nature of 14-19 year olds and the large variation in their backgrounds, beliefs, skills, and knowledge. These principles promote high standards for the acquisition of academic, social, and personal skills and knowledge by every student. They recommit us to assuring that all students have equitable access to learning opportunities which embody these principles. They guide our work by identifying ideals for which to strive in our teaching, parenting, and planning.

Students are successful in educational experiences which promote:

1 **A safe, respectful and caring environment.**
Learning requires a physically, emotionally, and intellectually safe and respectful environment. Undertaking this demands a community which supports risk-taking, invention, experimentation, and creativity by people who realize that growth is not a single event, but an ongoing process. Both adults and adolescents must be expected to model interactions with people and ideas that support the development of such a community.

All students need to learn, at least at some level, how to investigate like a scientist, evaluate like an historian, reason like a mathematician, and communicate like a writer and an artist.

Maine Learning Results (1996) pg. iv

2 **High universal expectations with a variety of learning opportunities.**
Learning must engage students in academically challenging opportunities and extend their knowledge, skills, and habits of mind beyond what is comfortable and traditional. As opportunities and challenges for adolescents continue to grow, it becomes ever more important that every student learns to meet new and ambitious learning standards. Understanding the diversity of communities, educational systems, and students across the state of Maine, we must also allow and encourage multiple pathways for student acquisition of skills, knowledge and habits of mind. Finally, it is not acceptable that select students learn enriching skills and knowledge; achievement of high standards must be expected of all students.

3 **Understanding and actions based on assessment data.**
As schools develop and collectively hold themselves accountable for deeper student understanding, those involved must develop practices that provide accurate understanding of student achievement, both individually and collectively. Furthermore, educational systems must be able to identify how learning structures (including teacher practice, grouping strategies, curriculum, and the use of time) support student achievement. Based on these two bodies of knowledge, the school community must be prepared to make suitable changes in learning structures in order to increase student achievement. These structures that support the secondary educational experience must routinely flex and adapt in order to support all students reaching deeper knowledge and understanding.

4 **Teacher practice which values and builds upon the contributions and needs of each learner.**
Learning builds and grows upon the past experiences, prior knowledge, and future needs of the learner. Just as all students bring different past experiences, different bases of knowledge, and different future needs to their learning, so must our schools build upon this diversity, spiraling from past experiences to new understanding, encouraging higher student aspirations, and enabling all students to reach their full potential.

5 **Equitable and democratic practices.**
Learning requires adults and adolescents to develop and model equitable and democratic practices which integrate, enable, value, empower, and expect contributions from all members of our communities. In support of this, learning organizations must develop and promote leadership structures which both use and consciously support these beliefs. While educational organizations must clearly state student expectations for knowledge, skills, and habits of mind, democratic practices that honor and accommodate diversity, respect varying opinions, and which promote ownership, responsibility and commitment must be supported.

6 **Coherence among mission, goals, actions, and outcomes.**
Learning requires adolescents and adults involved in the secondary educational experience to establish and follow a shared vision and a set of core beliefs which permeate the relationships, structures, and practices of the organization. Additionally, while vision and beliefs necessarily impact ideas and actions, ideas and actions must influence vision and beliefs, developing cohesion through the learning experience of all involved.

The key question, therefore, is not how the school conducts assessment but rather how it designs for reflective conversation about student performance.

McDonald (1996) pg. 116

PUBLIC SECONDARY EDUCATION IN MAINE IN 1998: AN OVERVIEW

In 1998, Approximately 74,000 Maine Youth attended 143 public high schools and applied technology schools and 10 "public-private" academies. The great majority of these schools served fewer than 600 students—an attribute of our schools that is now considered a strength by many researchers and educators.

Most of our secondary schools organize their curriculum by "subjects" and "track" students by ability and by future plans. Roughly half the schools operate a traditional schedule of seven or eight 45 minute class periods. The other half employs a form of "block scheduling" permitting 80 to 90 minute learning periods. Learning for the 12% of students in applied technology schools follows the needs and schedules of the students and their "trade."

Maine ranked eighth in the United States in the percentage of 20 year olds holding a high school diploma in 1996. During the 1990s, about 84% of entering ninth graders graduated from high school four years later. Dropout rates averaged 3-4% annually and home schooling and private school enrollments increased somewhat. Although no comprehensive national comparisons are available, Maine students compared favorably to other states' students on Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SATs). In 1997, 61% of high school graduates planned to go on to higher education (U.S. average: 70%).

The Commission's fourteen-month study of secondary schooling in Maine led to eight major observations. These observations helped us identify the challenges the state faces as we attempt to strengthen the educational experiences of our youth. The "current realities" we identified gave rise to the Core Principles which shaped the recommendations of our report. These observations and challenges are summarized below and described in more detail in Appendix B entitled, "The Current State of Public Secondary Education in Maine: The View from 1998."

Lower track classes are lame. They have too many kids in them who are smart but lazy. They are there because they don't have to work so hard. It's depressing; they just don't try.

Maine High School Student (1998)

1 **OBSERVATION 1** ✦ Maine schools are graduating the highest proportion of eligible students in the state's history.

CHALLENGE: To continue to raise this proportion and to assure that all graduates can perform at skill and knowledge levels as described by the Maine *Learning Results*.

2 **OBSERVATION 2** ✦ Secondary school students exhibit more varied and complex learning, social, and emotional needs than in the past.

CHALLENGE: To meet the needs of our increasingly diverse youth population without overtaxing the fiscal and human resources of our secondary schools.

3 **OBSERVATION 3** ✦ Significant disparities exist in access to learning for students within the secondary schools of Maine.

CHALLENGE: To assure equal access to learning for all Maine youth regardless of socioeconomic background, gender, or educational history; to know well and to value every student and her/his learning styles, needs, and aspirations.

4 **OBSERVATION 4** ✦ Academic achievement is, on average, high but uneven from school to school.

CHALLENGE: To provide conditions for students, educators, and parents in all Maine communities that will give all students equal opportunities to meet Maine's *Learning Results* and their own personal learning goals.

5 **OBSERVATION 5** ✦ Many Maine students (and some secondary educators) find secondary education irrelevant and feel disengaged from learning.

CHALLENGE: To authentically engage students, teachers, and parents in learning experiences that are rigorous and that students find relevant to their current needs and future ambitions.

6 **OBSERVATION 6** ✦ Maine students feel disengaged from serious decisions about their own education, about school life, and about their futures; many parents share these feelings.

CHALLENGE: To develop means through which students and their parents can make important decisions about future goals and current educational activities and can participate democratically in shaping school procedures that significantly affect student learning.

7 **OBSERVATION 7** ✦ The highest percentage of graduates in Maine's history is accepted at higher education institutions, but their rate of completion is no better than the national average, and they have low confidence in the value of higher education.

CHALLENGE: To provide continuous personal, academic, and career services throughout the transitional years which encompass secondary and higher education to permit every Maine youth to prepare for a productive and fulfilling life.

8 **OBSERVATION 8** ✦ Maine high schools serve many diffuse purposes and struggle to succeed at them all.

CHALLENGE: To focus the primary resources and energies of every Maine secondary school on its most central mission: learning; to refocus social, athletic, cultural, and behavioral missions to serve this central mission in a coherent fashion.

Low-skill jobs are disappearing at increasing speed. And the higher skill jobs that are proliferating require the very qualities that good educators have always valued: broad and deep knowledge, a critical mind, the capacity for autonomous and thoughtful behavior, the ability to relate productively to others, the ability to think well and the capacity to learn what one needs to learn when one needs to learn it.

Marc Tucker (1994) pg. 8

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CORE PRACTICES:
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

THE COMMISSION, following our Core Principles, developed a set of Core Practices. We believe that, if these fifteen practices are adopted in every secondary school in Maine, every student will meet the ambitious standards of the Maine *Learning Results* and will graduate from high school prepared for a productive future as an adult, citizen, and worker. The Commission invites discussion, debate, and revision of these Core Practices by schools, communities, and professional groups in their efforts to improve learning for our youth.

Such activity is bound to lead to many versions of these Core Practices. Indeed, they are not presented here as a "state mandate" or a common curriculum. They are instead a well-reasoned proposal that should stimulate creative thinking and sound planning throughout the state. As this activity proceeds, we urge groups to keep three basic points in mind:

We can improve. We can keep kids in school longer and achieve a better result. We cannot fail in education. If we fail, we fail our kids and we fail our future.

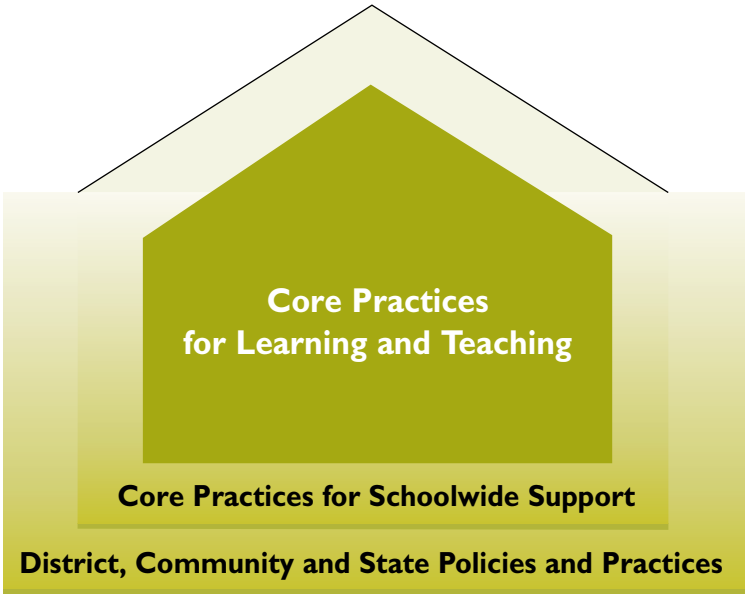
Jaime Escalante (1988 interview) pg. 12

1. The learning of all students should be **held to high, common performance standards** that are fashioned by the local school and district but that clearly address the Maine *Learning Results*' Guiding Principles (see Appendix A).

2. The **means by which students reach these standards must be as diverse** as are the students themselves; determining and pursuing these "pathways for learning" is the responsibility of the school, the student, and the parent(s).

3. The **assessment of student progress** must judge student learning against both **common and individual learning standards** and must be adapted to the diverse "pathways for learning" that students will follow.

The Commission's planning has been guided by a model which places learning and teaching at the heart of all decisions and activities:



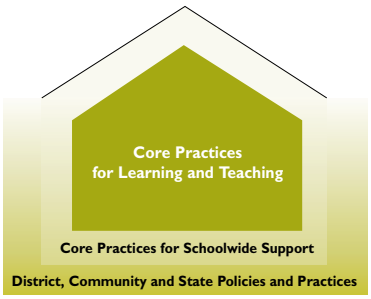
The Core Practices fall into two nested categories. At the center lie the practices of learning and teaching that determine most powerfully the student's learning accomplishments. Surrounding them are schoolwide practices that significantly shape the extent to which students, staff, and parents can succeed in their learning and teaching practices. Surrounding the school are district, community, and state policies and activities that, in turn, influence the school's ability to fulfill its mission.

The Commission believes that enduring school improvement begins and ends in the center of this diagram – with Core Practices for Learning and Teaching. Defining *learning results*, activities, and assessment **precedes** defining how the school must operate and what district, community, and state policies and practices are needed to optimize learning for all. This logic – starting in the center – puts youth and their learning first. The success a school enjoys is contingent on the coherence – or lack thereof – among these important, intersecting contexts of educational life.

The following two sections describe the Core Practices recommended by the Commission for learning and teaching and for schoolwide support of learning and teaching. Each Core Practice is described by a rationale, several "essential elements," and a "snapshot" example. Following the fifteen practices in a section entitled "Practices to Consider Phasing Out," we list some common practices which we find contradict the Core Principles and Practices. In the final section of this report, we present our recommendations for district, community, professional association, and state actions to support high schools and applied technology centers as they move forward with new practices.

I think about the children I'm planning for. I think about what it is that I want them to get from the subject. I pull together whatever is needed under that subject and think in terms of the group . . . then I make plans to fit the child I'm planning for.

Teacher comment from Darling-Hammond (1997) pg. 73



CORE PRACTICES FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING

THE COMMISSION RECOMMENDS THAT EVERY MAINE SECONDARY SCHOOL, in concert with parents and community members, examine its learning and teaching practices in light of the following eight Core Practices. Where necessary and advisable to benefit student learning, we urge adoption of these practices.

STUDENTS ARE RESPECTED AND VALUED

FULFILLING CORE PRINCIPLES:

1
a safe, respectful and caring environment

4
learners' needs and talents at the heart of teaching practices

1 CORE PRACTICE 1

Every student is respected and valued by adults and by fellow students.

RATIONALE

Youth in Maine, as elsewhere, seek respect, recognition, and autonomy. As they distance themselves from family and community, they seek responsibility and authority for themselves. Secondary educators and the peer group play crucial roles in this responsibility-building process. Adults must both guide and trust, push and accommodate, challenge and humor teenagers. But above all they must respect youth as they are, care about what they can become, and know them and their learning and developmental paths well. Every adult involved in the learning of youth—teachers, parents, coaches, employers, principals and more—is a model for the kind of adult every teenager can aspire to be.

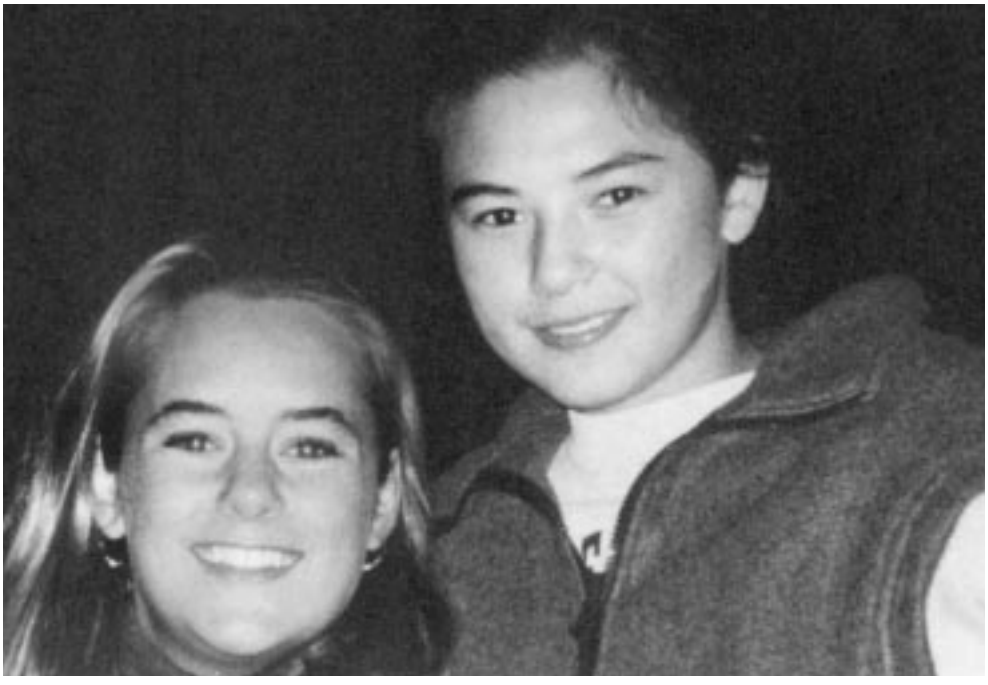
ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

- Every student is matched with at least one teacher who:
  - knows the student well personally and academically;
  - is continuously engaged with the student and parent(s) through the personal learning plan process;
  - guides and advocates for the student from grade 9 through graduation (See Core Practice #6).
- Periodic personal learning plan reviews include monitoring the social and emotional condition of the student, leading to alterations in schooling experiences as necessary to assure a dedicated focus on learning in a caring, equitable and democratic environment.
- Every adult demonstrates respect for every student in her/his daily behaviors and attitudes and structures the environment so that students learn to do so as well.

SNAPSHOT

TEACHERS AT THIS SMALL HIGH SCHOOL meet with their "family group" for nearly an hour each morning. During these sessions students discuss "hot" issues as well as seek advice regarding school-related work. Family Group teachers meet with this group of students throughout their high school years to ensure that each student is prepared for graduation, including assisting students with their graduation exhibitions. They are responsible for their students' learning plans, for parent conferences, and for mediating issues with other teachers. In this supportive setting students share their goals and aspirations for the future and encourage each other to be successful in school. Teachers use this time to teach important skills such as conflict resolution and peer mediation, as well as completing college applications. The Family Group is the glue of the school, connecting all students to a significant adult as well as to a group of students who share the same grade in school. During Family Group time, students plan their work for the week, such as time for service learning, internships, and course work. Teachers say it is very rewarding to personally hand each student their diplomas after fours year of "living" together.

For further ideas, see in bibliography: Goodlad, McDonald, Sarason, Sizer.



. . . schools must unabashedly teach students about such key virtues as honesty, dependability, trust, responsibility, tolerance, respect, and other commonly-held values important to Americans.

Breaking Ranks (1996) pg. 30

High Schools will create small units in which anonymity is banished.

Breaking Ranks (1996) pg. 45

LEARNING TAILORED TO NEEDS

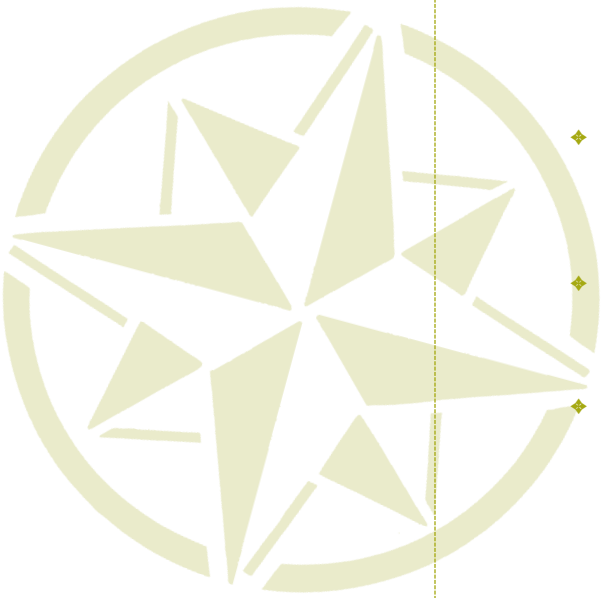
FULFILLING CORE PRINCIPLES:

2

high universal expectations, varied pathways for learning

4

learners' needs and talents at the heart of teaching practices



2 CORE PRACTICE 2

Every teacher tailors learning experiences to the learner's needs, interests, and future goals.

RATIONALE

Currently, learning is constrained by the length of teaching periods, departmentalization, the school facility, and other structures. Too many secondary students are neither challenged nor engaged; they merely "get by", learning the minimum to qualify for their Carnegie Unit graduation requirements. Learning that endures requires that students see reasons for what they are doing and understand expectations and goals. Direct, "hands on" engagement in learning often deepens its effects. Teenagers must be able to take responsibility for themselves as maturing learners, not only in their academic learning but as learners in the co-curriculum and as citizens of the school community.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

- Learning experiences are structured by the teacher with the active participation of each student to meet the student's needs and goals as expressed in the personal learning plan (see Core Practice #6).
- Teaching and the learning environment provide multiple ways to learn: "hands-on and minds-on," honoring differences in learning style, interest, and aspiration.
- Teaching extends students' grasp of concepts and information and builds skills essential to this extension of learning.
- Learning, as often as possible, is applied learning; it motivates students by connecting to their worlds and career interests; it proceeds through inquiry and problem-solving; past knowledge and established skills enable each student to answer questions that excite and perplex her/him.
- Teachers carry student loads of no more than 80 students in order to provide learning that conforms to these elements.

SNAPSHOT

FOR SOME STUDENTS, the algebra requirement is challenging, taking much longer than their peers to meet the learning standards. To accommodate the students' needs, students can return to their teachers to hear the lesson again instead of going to a study hall. Teachers integrate math activities with other core academic courses to find ways to meet the diverse styles of learners. Further, since teachers are on academic teams, they support each other by adjusting schedules to provide more time for a particular subject when needed. The team also holds an "after school block" for added academic support. Should the student not meet the *Learning Results* of the course (novice is not good enough!), summer school may be used for further study. In a school where four years of rigorous math are required, the school takes extraordinary measures to support all students in meeting the standards.

For further ideas, see in bibliography: Breaking Ranks; Cushman, Steinberg and Riordan; Green and Stevens; Gardner; Kohn; Sternberg; Tucker and Codding.

Teachers will be adept at acting as coaches and as facilitators of learning to promote more active involvement of students in their own learning.

Breaking Ranks (1996) pg. 23

All students need a thinking curriculum – one that provides a deep understanding of subjects and the ability to apply that understanding to the complex, real-world problems that the student will face as an adult.

Tucker & Codding (1998) pg. 77

While the division of learning into content areas is necessary to form a structure for writing performance standards, this does not mean that teaching should be divided in any similar way. In many schools, both learning and assessment are often successfully integrated across several content areas at one time.

Maine Learning Results (1997) pg. iii

FULFILLING CORE PRINCIPLES:

2

high universal expectations, varied pathways for learning

6

coherence of mission, goals, actions, and outcomes

SPECIALIZED AND INTEGRATED LEARNING

3 CORE PRACTICE 3

Every teacher challenges learners both to master the fundamentals of the disciplines and to integrate skills and concepts across the disciplines to address relevant issues and problems.

RATIONALE

Currently, most Maine secondary schools organize their staffs and their curricula by departments and disciplines. While maintaining the integrity of the disciplines is vital, this configuration often segments students' learning, disconnecting learning in one discipline from learning in another and from applications to past, present, and future experience (See Maine *Learning Results*). Further, it isolates teachers, and frustrates attempts to focus learning on the learner as opposed to on the subject matter, and impedes collaboration on schoolwide matters. Most rigorous learning, however, occurs across disciplines and collaboratively; the workplace calls for teamwork, problem-solving, and goal-oriented learning. Co-curricular activities, too, are too often separated from "studies" and viewed as "extra" rather than an integral part of the student's learning program.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

- Staff and students work together to plan and learn from each other in each curricular and co-curricular activity; teachers, coaches, advisors, and staff model learning.
- Staff, students, and parents, through the personal learning plan, connect a learning goal to all the student's activities, giving educational reason to them and bridging discipline differences and diverse types of activities (such as a sport, student government, and a classroom learning task).
- Teachers make the connections within and between the disciplines to provide learning experiences where students tackle problems and wrestle with the issues that they currently experience and will experience as adults. Technical schools provide us with good examples.
- Learning activities, to the degree possible, occur in collaborative settings; teamwork and the development of team skills are a central means of learning; individual and team achievements are assessed through peer critique and support.

- The co-curriculum is designed with learning goals for students as the central purpose for each activity, from student government to Science Olympiad to a junior varsity athletic team; each student's involvement is guided by her/his personal learning plan (see Core Practice #6).

SNAPSHOT

BECAUSE WE CAN, SHOULD WE? is the essential question for students on Sophomore Team 2 who work on learning goals in biology, English, history, and geometry through an integrated unit on bioethics. Students pursue the thorny issues of biotechnology, genetic engineering, transplants, gene therapy, and genetic screening in collaborative groups. They carry on debates, conduct surveys, lead discussions, write essays, as well as complete daily assignments; at the same time, they are learning core knowledge in core disciplines, where teachers connect the work to the essential questions of the bioethics theme and appropriate *Learning Results* skill and knowledge. Final projects, after assessment and reflection, become part of the students' portfolios. The next theme for this busy team: What's Worth Fighting For? Why?

For further ideas, see in the bibliography: Ancess, Darling-Hammond, Tucker and Codding.

It requires, from us all, energy, commitment, introspection, and a vision that all students can obtain a common core of learning.

Maine's Common Core of Leaning (1990) pg. 33

The real world demands collaboration, the collective solving of problems.

Sizer (1992) pg. 89

FULFILLING CORE PRINCIPLES:

1

a safe, respectful and caring environment

6

coherence of mission, goals, actions, and outcomes

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN DIVERSE GROUPS

4 CORE PRACTICE 4

Every student learns in collaborative groups of students with diverse learning styles, skills, ages, personal backgrounds, and career goals.

RATIONALE

Democracy and a productive economy require citizens and workers who can collaborate across the many differences that can divide people. Secondary schools, the last step in the public education system, often segregate students into tracks, reinforcing damaging academic and social stereotypes and limiting the learning of all students. A culture that communicates high expectations for all, equity of educational opportunity and goals, and democracy requires that students experience learning alongside – and in collaboration with – students who are distinctly different from them. Secondary students have well-established and very diverse learning styles, skills, and attitudes about school; their teachers, parents and peers must acknowledge and capitalize on these if each student is to achieve what is envisioned for them in the Maine *Learning Results* and the goals to which they themselves aspire.

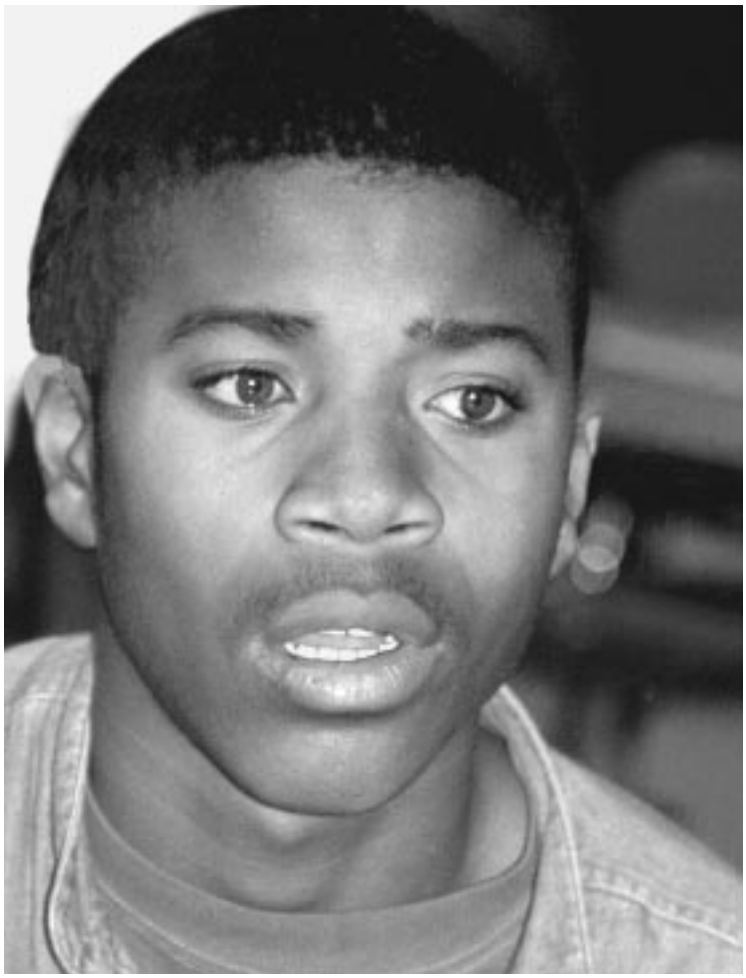
ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

- Students spend a significant portion of their learning day in heterogeneous groups that stress accomplishing collective and individual learning goals through collaborative effort and learning. Technical schools provide us with good examples.

- Teachers facilitate learning by grouping and re-grouping to assure each student's skill development at the same time that diverse groups of students are pursuing inquiry and knowledge acquisition collaboratively. Homogeneous grouping for specified purposes and durations are best suited for students who share a well-focused learning goal or a singular talent.

- Personal learning plans describe individual pathways through which each student will achieve common and individual learning goals (see Core Practice #6).

- Faculty, parents, and students design learning activities, time, space, and resources to enhance these individual pathways. Schedules, class sizes, linkages between high schools and applied technology schools, and flexible staffing are essential to this practice.



SNAPSHOT

Students in grades nine and ten are on heterogeneously grouped teams where they take their core academic courses. To earn a distinguished grade, students may elect to do more challenging tasks within the classroom. Students may be regrouped within any class depending upon the activity or skill level. Students are assessed according to the standards for each course; there are no "effort" grades. Special needs students are included with teachers and aides assisting the classroom teacher.
A Learning Center provides tutors for those needing more time to learn material. The school philosophy states that "all students can learn, but that they learn at different paces and in different ways." While courses at the junior and senior level are also heterogeneously grouped, specialized and honors courses are available to any students who desire access to them and who are ready for them.

For further ideas, see in biliography: Cohen, Finley, Kahn, Oakes, O'Neil, Slavin, Tucker and Codding, Wheelock.

STUDENTS MAKE CHOICES

5

CORE PRACTICE 5

Every student makes informed choices about education and participation in school life and takes responsibility for the consequences of those choices.

RATIONALE

Currently, many teens feel "force fed" by secondary schools; some respond by balking, withdrawing, and doing enough simply to "get by." As a result, their achievement can be limited, their learning disconnected from their goals, and their aspirations can shrink simply to finishing high school. To develop maturity and independent skills that will stand them in good stead later, students must learn to make informed, well-reasoned choices while also taking risks to expand their learning. Hand in hand with this, they need to take responsibility for the consequences of their choices and to learn from them. To succeed, students need the support, guidance, and "push" of the significant adults around them.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

- Every student, through her/his personal learning plan and in daily contacts with teachers and staff, is engaged in answering these three questions regarding her/his activities:
  - What am I expecting to learn here?
  - Why is it important for me to learn this?
  - Am I proceeding in a manner that is most fruitful?
- Every student receives frequent feedback from adults and peers and regularly reviews, evaluates, and plans "next" learning activities based on this feedback.
- The learning environment includes options for every student to learn in diverse ways: in school, in the community, and through methods such as didactic instruction, individual study and research, and group problem solving.
- Every student takes part in decisions that affect her/his education and the quality of student life in school, including decisions to choose educational programs and to fashion her/his own unique pathway.

FULFILLING CORE PRINCIPLES:

3

understanding and actions based on assessment data

6

coherence of mission, goals, actions, and outcomes

SNAPSHOT

A TEAM OF TEACHERS using the Foxfire approach helps students decide the ways they will learn the expected content in the unit on war. While students do not have the choice of what to learn, they suggest many ways to go about mastering the content. Students on this team have a voice and choice in their learning; they feel empowered to make decisions about team events, celebrations, and management. They have opportunities every day to make choices within the safe framework of the team. Teachers and students practice giving each other regular feedback about how the work is going through the use of protocols for reflection and sharing of work.

For further ideas, see in bibliography: Darling-Hammond, Meier; Schlechty and Cushman; Steinberg and Riordan.

If teachers choose to treat the students like young adults, the students need to choose to accept that responsibility.

Maine student motto, Commission Forum (1997)

www.state.me.us/education

A PERSONAL LEARNING PLAN

6 CORE PRACTICE 6

Every student employs a personal learning plan to target individual as well as common learning goals and to specify learning activities that will lead to the attainment of those goals.

FULFILLING CORE PRINCIPLES:

2

high universal expectations, varied pathways for learning

3

understanding and actions based on assessment data

4

learners' needs and talents at the heart of teaching practices

RATIONALE

Individuals vary greatly and increasingly through the secondary years in their learning styles, interests, histories, and aspirations. Currently, our system treats most students identically in these regards. To reach the goals of high achievement and high aspirations for every Maine youth presented in the Maine *Learning Results*, schooling must recognize the individuality of each student's learning path. The student's voice and the voices of her/his parents are essential to the school's ability to meet the student's personal learning goals. The joint effort of students, parents, and school staff is necessary if students are to attain what they seek and what we seek for them.

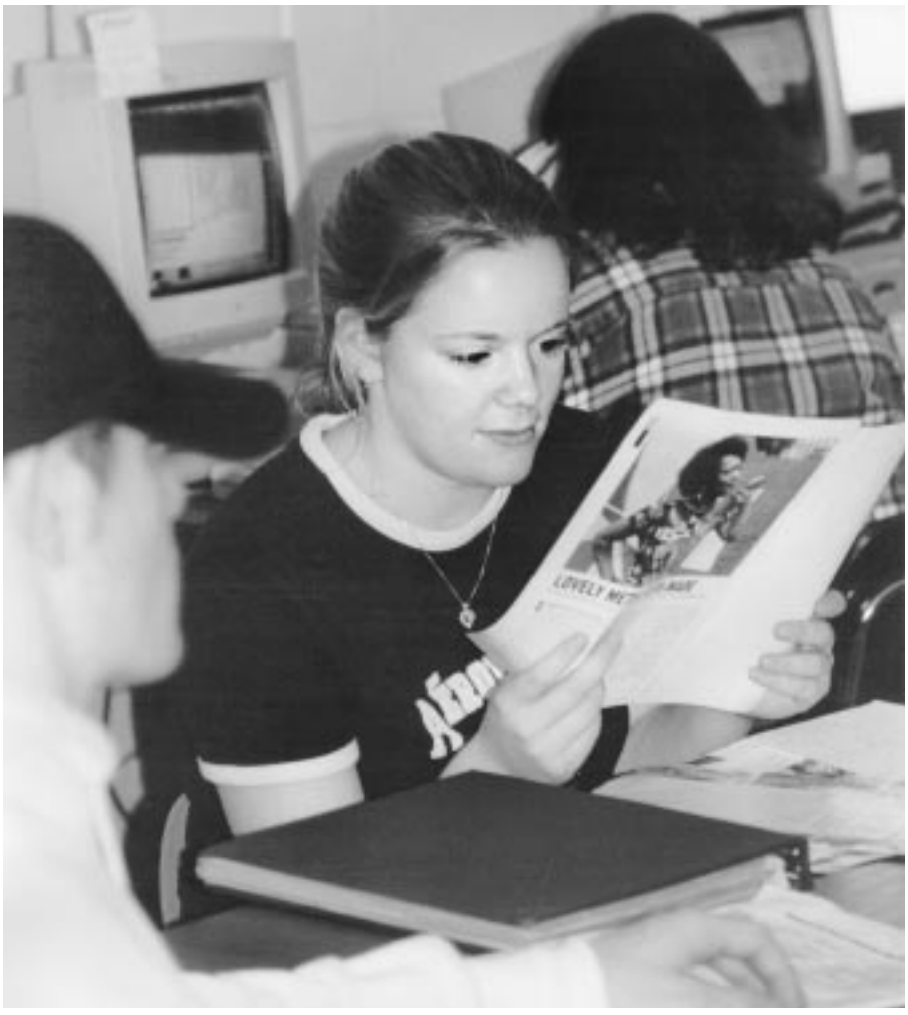
ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

- The personal learning plan begins "where the student is" and identifies learning strengths, challenges, and strategies to meet:
  - goals and standards common to all students that are developed by each school and that adhere to the Guiding Principles of the Maine *Learning Results*;
  - the student's goals for future education, work, and life choices.
- Student, teacher(s), and parent(s) collaborate in the plan's development, execution, and review.
- Progress is reviewed every 6-8 weeks: past activity and assessments are used to revisit and, if appropriate, revise learning plans.
- Parents and staff use the plan as a planning device for the transition from secondary school to a future appropriate for each student; plans and assessments constitute a portfolio that exhibits, for future purposes, the student's talents, challenges, and future potential.

SNAPSHOT

WITH THEIR GRADUATION COMMITTEE, students at Central Park East High School develop an individual learning plan to guide them through the fourteen exhibitions required to earn the high school diploma. The plan includes the students' proposals for how course work, community service, and career exploration will be accomplished over the last two years of high school. To enter the Senior Institute, the junior-senior level, students must have shared their future plan with parents and advisors. There is an emphasis on all students entering higher education, thus the future plan is the beginning of a very important journey. The Graduation Committee includes the student's advisor and other teachers who will guide and support students through their Learning Plan.

For further ideas, see in the bibliography: Bracy; Cawelti; Fass, Lindsay and Webb; Gardner; Lee and Smith; McDonald.



Empowering students to make realistic, rational and self-affirming career plans should serve as a powerful engine of retention, achievement, and graduation – by establishing a concrete, meaningful and believable relationship between effort and achievement in school and success in the labor market and life.

Chris Lyons, Director,
Office of School-to-Work
Opportunities, Maine
Department of Education (1997)

Schools should have universal goals that apply to all students.

Coalition of Essential Schools (3rd principle)

FULFILLING CORE PRINCIPLES:

3

understanding and actions based on assessment data

6

coherence of mission, goals, actions, and outcomes

CLEAR STANDARDS, ACTIVITIES, AND ASSESSMENT

7 CORE PRACTICE 7

Every teacher makes learning standards, activities, and assessment procedures known to students and parents and assures the coherence among them.

RATIONALE

Currently, too many students are unable to take responsibility for their learning because they are unaware of the "results" they are supposed to produce, the performance standards to which they should aspire, and sometimes the purpose and relevance of assignments. Only the most self-motivated students or those with the greatest adult supervision make the kinds of learning gains we seek for all students. Students cannot become mature learners or decision-makers unless teachers share with them the purposes and plans for learning activities and remain open to student input.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

- Teachers make clear and specific to students and parents:
  - expected learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, attitudes) consonant with the school's vision, the school's common goals for all students, and the Maine *Learning Results*;
  - a rubric describing standards of performance by which learning experiences are to be evaluated;
  - a description of learning activities and resources available for students and teachers to reach these goals;
  - specific and multiple means by which student achievement will be frequently assessed and by which the results of those assessments will be used to design subsequent learning goals and activities in the personal learning plan process.

SNAPSHOT

FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE SCHOOL YEAR, students are aware of the *Learning Results* required in each of their courses as well as the requirements and rubrics that they and teachers will use to assess progress. To document their mastery, a portfolio of best work is maintained where assessments from all courses demonstrate progress toward the *Learning Results*. Teachers and students write reflections on the work throughout the year. At the end of each semester, exhibitions replace the traditional final exams. Students use the rubrics to assess their learning and their peers' learning and parents are often invited to participate. The senior year culminates in a Senior Celebration, a final, culminating research project demonstrating achievement of the school's learning standards, required for all to earn the diploma.

For further ideas, see in bibliography: Breaking Ranks; Darling-Hammond; Tucker and Codding.

A good teacher is one who makes it O.K. to make mistakes and makes us go back over things you don't understand, correct it, and learn it. Going back to see what we did wrong, that's how you learn – from making mistakes and looking to see how to do it right.

Maine High School Student (1998)

They shouldn't cover the material instead of having us learn the material.

Maine High School Student (1998)

FULFILLING CORE PRINCIPLES:

2

high universal expectations, varied pathways for learning

3

understanding and actions based on assessment data

6

coherence of mission, goals, actions, and outcomes

DIPLOMA BASED ON DEMONSTRATED ACHIEVEMENTS

8 CORE PRACTICE 8

Every student who receives the secondary school diploma has demonstrated, through performance exhibitions, knowledge and skills at a level deemed by the school and by the state to be sufficient to begin adult life.

RATIONALE

Currently, a student's eligibility to graduate is determined by the accumulation of credits, not by evidence that he or she has acquired a common foundation of skills and knowledge. With the establishment of the Maine *Learning Results*, every Maine youth is expected to reach a common level of achievement that is both equal to every other Maine youth and productive for the future. The public schools and the state itself are obligated to see that every student has met this standard and to assure students, parents and their communities that students possess at graduation the fundamental tools for a successful adulthood.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

- The local comprehensive assessment system designates standards of performance that are common to all students and consonant with the Guiding Principles of the Maine *Learning Results* and any others specified by the local district.
- Each student demonstrates through a variety of performance exhibitions, portfolio reviews and the Maine Educational Assessment that she/he has or has not matched the expected levels of performance.
- Student, parent(s), and teacher(s) together decide when and how the student will seek to meet the qualifying standards.
- Schools and communities determine other requirements for the diploma as they see fit.

www.state.me.us/education

Too often, we allow learning to be optional for students.

Maine High School Teacher (1998)

SNAPSHOT

THE STUDENT SPEAKER at a recent graduation ceremony reminded her classmates of how their high school experience was different from other Maine students.' They were all required to demonstrate mastery of the *Learning Results* through a graduation portfolio and senior exhibition. All were required to serve their communities and participate in career exploration experiences. All completed a rigorous core curriculum, including four years of math and science. To earn "credit" for graduation, students demonstrated that they had met the standards, as assessed in a variety of ways. Students enjoyed a rich variety of learning experiences and all understood the value of the high school diploma because the standards set by the school were clear from the beginning of their experience and through to the end.

For further ideas, see in bibliography: Gardner; McDonald; Meier; Perrone; Schlechty; Sizer; Wasley, Hempel, and Clark.

[Our success] will rest on whether the definition of standards that prevails focuses on traditional academic content, as measured by multiple choice and short-answer tests, or on new combinations of academic and applied learning, demonstrated through projects and performances that reveal habits of mind and work.

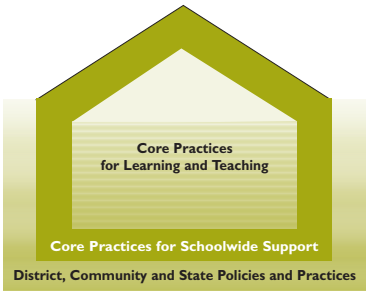
Cushman, Steinberg, and Riordan (1998) pg. 33

"For more than thirty years, studies of school organization have consistently found that small schools (with enrollment of roughly 300 to 600) promote higher student achievement, higher attendance, lower dropout rates, greater participation in school activities, more positive feelings toward self and school, more positive behavior, less violence and vandalism, and greater post-school success.

Darling-Hammond (1997) pg. 139

www.state.me.us/education

CORE PRACTICES FOR SCHOOL SUPPORT



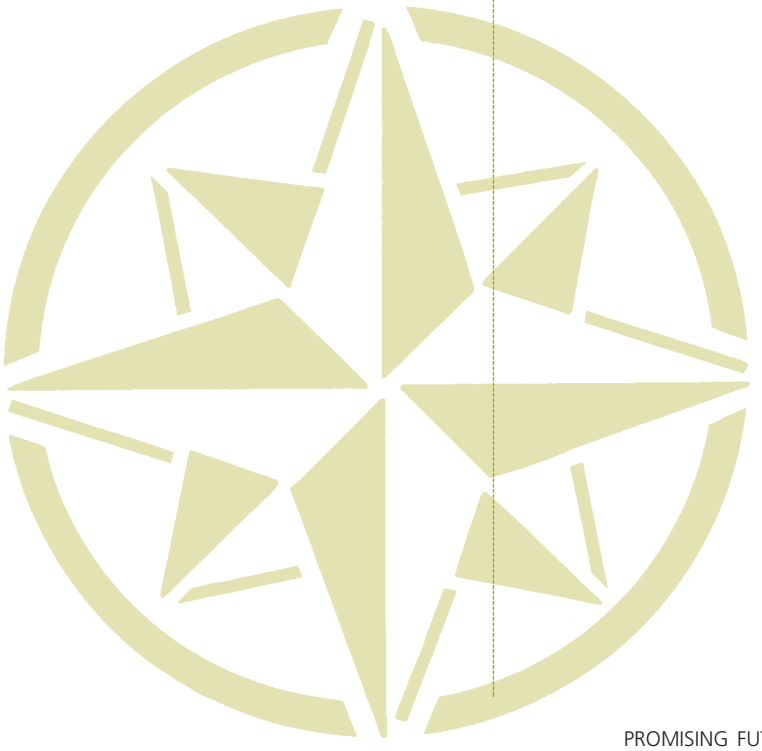
THE EIGHT CORE PRACTICES FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING are embraced by many Maine teachers, administrators, parents, and students. While the Commission found many staff working toward these practices, many others remain unable to implement them or even unwilling to consider them. A common obstacle to their progress is the traditional structure and culture of the American high school: short periods for teaching; student loads of more than 110 students per day; the imperative to "cover content" rather than to build skills and understanding; the containment of adolescent behavior. (A summary of such practices can be found in the section entitled, "Practices to Consider Phasing Out.")

The Commission recommends unequivocally that any plan to improve learning and teaching **must include a partner plan to shift schedule, assignments, and procedures in order that better learning and teaching practices will be supported and can flourish.** This section of our report addresses the organizational support layer of the learning improvement process. It presents seven institutional practices deemed by the Commission to be essential to the success of those learning and teaching practices recommended above.

In the following text, by the term "faculty," we mean teachers, administrators, counselors, co-curricular faculty, and educational technicians. By "staff," we mean all adult employees who work at the school.

A new curriculum will have to be invented that is flexible enough to provide many paths leading to the same place.

Tucker (1994) pg. 12



TEAMS FOR LEARNING AND GROWTH

9 CORE PRACTICE 9

Students and teachers belong to teams that provide each student continuous personal and academic attention and a supportive environment for learning and growth.

FULFILLING CORE PRINCIPLES:

1

a safe, respectful and caring environment

5

equitable and democratic practices

6

coherence of mission, goals, actions, and outcomes

RATIONALE

Currently, the integration of a student's learning experience is, for most Maine youth, left to the student and perhaps the parents and guidance counselor. A small group of staff who work as a team with a manageable group of students can connect assessment and goal-setting with instruction and other forms of learning in a seamless and continuous manner. Such a team can also build and maintain meaningful ways for parents to remain integral to their teenager's education and growth. Finally, such teams can explicitly address the increasingly complex and numerous personal and social issues affecting the learning and maturation of Maine teens.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

- The team provides a significant portion of the student's academic learning experiences, the individual goal-setting, planning, and review activities of the personal learning plan, and a respectful "home base" where every student has an equal voice in team affairs.
- Teams are not larger than 100 students and 6 faculty; they include a cross-section of students and remain together for the duration of the student's secondary educational career to the degree possible.
- The school schedule provides time regularly for the team's planning, assessment, and parent/student communication activities.
- The school allocates each team sufficient space and equipment to facilitate its work and to give each student work space to support her/his continuous learning activities.
- Parental participation in their students' learning occurs through the team structure and, within it, the personal learning plan process.

SNAPSHOT

80 STUDENTS ON THE NINTH GRADE "maroon" team study English, math, science, and history through integrated themes and projects connected to achieving Maine's *Learning Results*.

The team has five blocks of time together over a two-day block schedule, giving them lots of time to work and enjoy field trips without disturbing other teams in the school. Teachers meet for 90 minutes every other day to plan curricula, meet with students or parents, and to manage the work of the team. A guidance counselor and special education teacher are integral to the team. As this particular team will stay together for two years, they look forward to their summer hiking trip to kick off their sophomore year.

For further ideas, see in bibliography: Breaking Ranks; Green and Stevens; Maine's Common Core of Learning; McDonald; Sizer.

Teaming has allowed opportunities for collaboration and professional growth. The support and sharing (working on the work) has been invaluable. The empowerment of time within our team time has allowed us to make decisions previously made by administration. We can put student learning as the primary criterion for making our decisions.

Teacher comment in Cawelti (1994) pg. 44

Our educational process must move away from the fragmenting of knowledge that has characterized it in the past.

Maine's Common Core of Learning (1990) pg. 18

FULFILLING CORE PRINCIPLES:

1

a safe, respectful and caring environment

2

high universal expectations, varied pathways for learning

4

learners' needs and talents at the heart of teaching practices

SCHOOL IS ORGANIZED FOR LEARNING

10 CORE PRACTICE 10

Learning governs the allocation of time, space, facilities, and services.

RATIONALE

In the past, Maine high schools have strived to duplicate the comprehensive high school model, with teachers specialized by discipline and the school day segmented by seven or eight periods. These practices have left increasing numbers of students unchallenged or unable to meet the challenges put to them. We have ignored the advantages that small size and community involvement can offer. Learning will improve when teacher and student can shape how time, space, facilities, equipment and other services can best serve the learning needs of the student. Flexibility, student responsiveness, and partnerships with parents, business, universities, and community are essential to this learning-centered model for school organization.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

- Each student's personal learning plan guides decisions about "best learning" practices for that student.
- Teacher teams, in concert with student and parent, have the flexibility to shape schedules, facilities, and other resources to meet student learning goals.
- The timeframe in which learning occurs is unlimited; the length and form of a learning day, week, and year are shaped to meet student learning goals.
- The "co-curriculum" is an essential part of the "curriculum"; students are expected to learn valuable skills and attitudes in each; and all curriculum is designed to address common and individual learning goals and standards (see Maine *Learning Results*).
- Resources for learning are not limited to the school building and budget and include social services, universities, businesses, and public service agencies among others.
- Students have, at all times, learning goals that focus and direct their activities; they pursue learning activities until their learning goals are attained.

SNAPSHOT

AFTER ATTENDING THEIR CORE ACADEMIC COURSES, students in the School to Career program leave school to pursue unpaid internships with professional people in the community. Internships, available to juniors and seniors, include such varied professions as the arts, medicine, veterinary science, and environmental work. Academic courses, portfolios and projects include learnings from their internships, which may take place at any time of the school week or weekends. While the internships do not replace required academic courses, students may use projects done with their mentors to satisfy course requirements. Students conclude their internships with public exhibitions of their learning and personal growth.

For further ideas, see in bibliography: Cawelti; Lee and Smith; Prisoners of Time, Sizer.

Some kids sprint; some kids crawl. Each has his own pace. The variation wreaks havoc with orderly syllabi and precise fifty-two minute periods.

Sizer (1992) pg. 88

. . . it requires of a school that it become a place for teacher learning too. This requires extensive rewiring: introducing opportunities for teachers to meet in learning groups, study privately, gain access to teaching resources, get their minds around what they teach.

McDonald (1996) pg. 104

FULFILLING CORE PRINCIPLES:

4

learners' needs and talents at the heart of teaching practices

6

coherence of mission, goals, actions, and outcomes

TEACHERS HAVE TIME AND RESOURCES

11 CORE PRACTICE 11

Every teacher has sufficient time and resources to learn, to plan, and to confer with individual students, colleagues, and families.

RATIONALE

The current teacher's worklife stems from a time when teachers were assumed to have "learned their field" in college and students were expected to "learn what the teacher knows." The knowledge explosion and our increasingly sophisticated understanding of teens and their learning make this job definition harmfully obsolete. Secondary teachers, in the future, will need time to meet in teams, with students individually, and with parents. They will need to devise individualized learning activities for students, and their own knowledge and skills will need to expand in order to match the ever-widening variety of learning and teaching challenges presented by students. Initially, teachers will need more time, support, and direct assistance to learn to "be a teacher" in the new way suggested by the Commission.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

School administrators and faculty schedule time in the instructional day for team planning and learning, as described in the following elements:

- Teams schedule time regularly in the instructional day for student exhibitions, interpretation and evaluation of learning, planning of future instructional activities, and regular communication with students and families (see Core Practice #6).
- Teams have space to work and access to resources to make their plans succeed.
- Teachers belong to two types of teams: the interdisciplinary teaching team described in Core Practice #9 and discipline-specific teams (which provide intellectual stimulation and collaboration with colleagues about developments and curricular ideas in the disciplines).
- These activities are understood to be an integral part of the teacher's job description and the time they require is understood to be as essential to effective performance as is direct instruction.

SNAPSHOT

WORKING IN A COLLABORATIVE ENVIRONMENT with peers is integral to every teacher's life in this high school. Teachers on the same team meet for one block every other day to plan curriculum and meet with students and parents. Teachers from different disciplines pair up to offer junior-senior seminars around special topics of interest. This requires common teaching and planning time with a group of students who will meet together for two years. Having common schedules allows teaching teams and their students to meet during planning time. Further, teachers with common interests or teaching assignments meet to share curriculum and materials within their disciplines. Many teachers belong to Critical Friends Groups where teachers talk about classroom practice, consult on their work or student work, and discuss articles of common interest.

For further ideas, see in bibliography: Ancess; Barth; Cuban; Darling-Hammond; Elmore; and Wasley, Hempel and Clark.

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Over the past century of American education, the term "applied" has become synonymous with watered-down academics, offered to reluctant or resistant students as a substitute for the college-preparatory curriculum, and "academic rigor" has become equated with the coverage of discrete subject matters, as measured in standardized tests. But, as John Dewey pointed out in the early years of this century, the most powerful learning comes from combining the intellectual and the practical. In using knowledge, or "intellectualizing" practical activities, students develop deep understanding of important concepts and ideas.

Steinberg (1998) pg. 41

A POSITIVE, KNOWLEDGEABLE STAFF

FULFILLING CORE PRINCIPLES:

3

understanding and actions based on assessment data

4

learners' needs and talents at the heart of teaching practices

6

coherence of mission, goals, actions, and outcomes

12

CORE PRACTICE 12

Every staff member understands adolescent learning and developmental needs, possesses diverse instructional skills, and is a constructive model for youth.

RATIONALE

The Core Practices for Learning and Teaching hinge on each teacher's ability to understand a wide array of students and their diverse learning goals, challenges, and styles. Further, they require teachers who can invent and carry through instructional and learning activities to meet the needs of these diverse students. Not only teachers but all staff shape in vital ways the behaviors, attitudes, and values our youth associate with mature adulthood. Coaches, supervisors, secretaries, custodians, bus drivers, and educational technicians all play important roles. The quality of our teachers and staff as mature adults and workers is the most influential factor in the successful education of our youth.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

- The staff in each district establish high standards of professional practice that include: knowledge of adolescents and their learning and development; expertise in diverse skills; and understanding the critical role of adults as constructive role models.
- Districts employ a system for professional assessment that includes self-evaluation, student feedback, parent feedback, peer observation and review, and administrator observation and review.
- Teachers have at least two opportunities annually to present to colleagues demonstrable evidence of their competencies as learning specialists, instructors, and models for youth and to develop goals and support for their professional development (see Core Practice #13).
- These practices are applied in comparable form to all employees with direct responsibility for students (e.g., librarians, principals, counselors, coaches/advisors, workplace mentors, secretaries, custodians, etc.).

SNAPSHOT

". . . WHAT"S GOING ON WITH LESLIE?" Ginny asked during a lull in the conversation during the weekly Team Conference. "She's so spaced out these days in Ecology in Our Lives. She looks exhausted!" Ken Dalton agreed: "I know what you mean, Ginny. At practice, I've got to stay on her all the time."

Maureen and Carl glanced at one another. The humanities team was privy to Leslie's daily journals where she had recently been evaluating her future options. "She's really going through some heavy thinking," Maureen said, "and it's probably not surprising that she's withdrawn. I wonder if we shouldn't all get together with her."

Carl added, "Yeah, that's a good idea. She seems to be struggling with the college option and, you know, she'd be the first from her family ever to go to college, and maybe even to leave the valley at this age."

Ginny and Ken, who was from the valley himself, nodded. "I know what you mean," Ken noted. "That can take an awful lot out of you. I wonder how we could help her think this through. Are there books about transitions we can give her?"

"Good idea," said Maureen. "What about her physical exhaustion, though? Can you cut her some slack this week in practice, Ken? We should call her mother, too, and set up a conference with the six of us."

For further ideas, see in bibliography: Barth, Darling-Hammond, Sergiovanni, Sizer.

On any given day, I think every adolescent is at-risk in some way. How many schools approach such concerns with purposeful, planned and progressive awareness-building, educational, and intervention strategies in place as opposed to trying to deny these realities or being caught in a reactive, crisis-oriented position?

Marnik (1997) pg. 47

I have learned so much here, not just in class but about life. The ladies in the lunchroom and my band director were as memorable as some of my teachers.

Maine High School Student (1998)

FULFILLING CORE PRINCIPLES:

2

high universal expectations, varied pathways for learning

5

equitable and democratic practices

6

coherence of mission, goals, actions, and outcomes

A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

13

CORE PRACTICE 13

Every school has a comprehensive professional development system in which every staff member has a professional development plan to guide improvement.

RATIONALE

If secondary education in Maine is to take the strides suggested by the Commission, all school staff must be engaged in changing what they do, what they know, and even what they value and believe. While teachers are most directly involved with student learning and the attainment of performance standards, other professional staff such as principals and counselors significantly shape the way teachers and students go about their work. In addition, virtually all adults who come in contact with students affect teens' self-confidence, sense of value, and focus on learning. Every school, to be truly professional, needs a system for professional development that focuses every staff member on fulfilling the school's mission and accommodates his or her individual learning goals and career stage.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

- Each staff member's job description and responsibilities specify how her/his work impacts:
  - the school's mission and goals;
  - the students' ability to learn;
  - respect and care for each student;
  - other employees' ability to succeed as members of the school team.
- Each staff member has an individual plan for professional improvement which:
  - identifies staff skills, knowledge, and attitudes that can improve the experiences and achievement of students;
  - specifies professional growth activities that will build these competencies;
  - establishes a system of regular performance review and professional development planning.

- The schoolwide system of professional development provides resources tailored to the individual goals and and career needs of each employee which include support teams, peer observation and consultation, and access to learning beyond the school and the school day.

- Time devoted to professional learning and growth are considered an integral part of the staff member's work day, week, and year.

SNAPSHOT

The personal investment of all employees in fulfilling the mission of the district is apparent in involvement of all staff in professional development activitities. Educational Technicians attend all professional workshops days. All district secretaries have their own guided session on how their work contributes to the mission, vision, and beliefs of the school community. All support staff participate in awareness sessions on the Maine *Learning Results* and other key issues that are central to the district's work. These activities are included in support staff job descriptions and become part of the individual's professional development portfolio.

See also in bibliography: Darling-Hammond, Maine *Learning Results* Professional Development Design Team.

A theory for the schoolhouse should provide the conditions that allow the school to become a center of inquiry.

Sergiovanni (1996) pg. 40

DEMOCRATIC INVOLVEMENT IN SIGNIFICANT DECISIONS

14 CORE PRACTICE 14

Staff, students, and parents are involved democratically in significant decisions affecting student learning.

FULFILLING CORE PRINCIPLES:

1

a safe, respectful and caring environment

5

equitable and democratic practices

RATIONALE

Numerous forces such as consolidation and professionalization have in the past conspired to remove parental and community voices from the education of their youth. Students themselves have seldom had any voice in whether and how their experiences in school lead to meaningful learning. As we contemplate a future that will require higher levels of performance, teamwork, and decision-making, the opportunities to learn such skills become critically important. Since students, parents, and staff share the responsibility and influence over student learning, they must together decide how the learning process will proceed so that it benefits optimally each student.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

- The personal learning plan process establishes the separate and shared responsibilities of teacher, student, and parent in the education of each student.
- Students, parents, and staff participate in developing and upholding a "constitution" for the school. The constitution addresses, among other things, roles and responsibilities with regard to:
  - norms and rules of conduct;
  - setting goals and planning action to meet them;
  - carrying out plans and evaluating their effectiveness in a constructive manner.
- Students, parents, and staff participate in decisions about core matters including goals and mission, educational expectations of students, culture and climate of the school, and allocation of time, space, and other resources.
- Staff welcome and encourage parents to share responsibility with them and with students for their students' learning activities and outcomes.
- Faculty play a significant leadership role in policies and decision-making based on their intense daily involvement in matters of learning (see Core Practice #10).

- Students engage in learning activities, such as school-to-career internships and apprenticeships, which require mature adult conduct and "real-time" learning.

SNAPSHOT

PARENTS WERE ASKED TO CONTRIBUTE THEIR IDEAS and opinions regarding students' requests to change the grade reporting system. Teachers wanted to get out of the number-averaging business. Students, while on the one hand holding fast to their "99's," could see the dissonance between the performance assessments they do in class and the traditional numerical report card. Parents worried about college acceptances, competition for scholarships and how the valedictorian would be decided if the old system were thrown out. Parents, teachers, students, and board members held small group dialogues over several months. They invited "outside experts" and college admission directors to inform their work. In the end, the school decided that six narrative progress reports would be written each year, with a letter grade awarded at the end of each semester, when credit is granted. Together, the community decided that the idea of "continuous progress" toward achieving the *Learning Results* could be best described by narrative reports.

For further ideas, see in bibliography: Barth, Glickman, Meier, Sarason, Sergiovanni.

Democratic learning in schools is a set of purposeful activities, always building toward increasing student activity, choice, participation, connection, and contribution. It always aims for students, individually and collectively, to take on greater responsibility for their own learning. It is not a pedagogy of opening up the classroom doors and telling students to be free.

Glickman address at Colby College (1996)

It is not enough to want to do the right thing. We must have the will and take up the challenge of school leadership as our life calling. The essence of leadership is, after all, action. "talk, without work, is dead," (James 2:17).

Sergiovanni (1997) pg. 173

FULFILLING CORE PRINCIPLES:

5

equitable and democratic practices

6

coherence of mission, goals, actions, and outcomes

PRINCIPALS WHO MOBILIZE OTHERS TO TEACH AND LEARN

15 CORE PRACTICE 15

Active leadership by principals inspires and mobilizes staff, students, and parents to work toward the fulfillment of the school's mission and, within it, their own learning and life goals.

RATIONALE

Inspired leaders are essential to the improvement of Maine's secondary schools. Leadership in the past has been as constrained by school structures as have teachers and instructional practices; administrative priorities and managerial imperatives have too often been the order of the day and administrators have "lost touch" with instruction and learning. To serve the diverse needs of students, principals–in conjunction with teacher leaders–face daily the tasks of mobilizing staff, students, and others to respond to the priorities of learning and teaching. New leadership will assure that flexibility, inventiveness, caring and achievement–not routine, containment, and compliance –are the order of the day in our secondary schools. Principals will be stewards of the school's mission, facilitators of decision-making and collective accountability, and builders of partnerships with businesses and community organizations.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

In schools governed by democratic principles, where responsibility and accountability are shared by staff, students, and parents, the principal's major roles are:

- to assure that the school's educational mission is articulated and that all policies, procedures, and activities are directed toward its fulfillment;
- to develop staff leadership and promote opportunities for teams and team leaders to take both authority and responsibility for instructional effectiveness, including assigning management responsibilities and the allocation of time, space, facilities, and resources to the needs of their students;
- to maximize the performance of staff and students–acquiring information, professional resources, and other resources to support the learning activities of students and the professional development activities of staff;

- to establish linkages to parents, community organizations, businesses, professional organizations and universities in the service of the learning goals of students and programs;
- to coordinate rather than control the effective use of space, time, facilities, equipment, and other resources so that all programs and students are equitably and efficiently served.

SNAPSHOT

THE FOURTEEN MEMBER FACULTY COUNCIL, made up of teacher team leaders, administrators, and other interested teachers, is charged with leading faculty meetings and staff development planning for the school. The Council takes a lead role in writing grants, communicating the school's vision and purpose to the school community, and building the capacity for all teachers in the school to become leaders. The principals participate as members of the Council, as "keepers of the vision," and provide adequate resources to support the work of the Council. All Council meetings are public, open to interested teachers, students and parents. The Student Council, made up of volunteers from each academic team, sends representatives to all teacher meetings and workshops, and also selects two members to serve on the district's Board of Directors.

For further ideas, see in bibliography: Ackerman, Donaldson and Van der Bogert; Barth; Boyer; Breaking Ranks; Elmore; Evans, Hirsch, Sarason and Sergiovanni.

Leadership should not be undertaken blindly or lightly. Our schools need principals who not only aspire to move their schools ahead but also have the background and the capacities to make sense of their dynamic organizations and to share that sense with the school community so that its efforts will be profitably directed.

Ackerman, Donaldson, and Van der Bogert (1996) pg. 12

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PRACTICES TO CONSIDER PHASING OUT

THE COMMISSION HEARD FROM STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, AND PARENTS that some well-entrenched practices often interfere with effective learning in Maine's secondary schools. The Commission recommends that schools, districts, and communities carefully evaluate whether the following practices continue to serve the best interests of ALL their students. If they do not, they should be phased out and replaced with relevant aspects of the fifteen Core Practices reported here.

We fail to inspire students in high school. We have to make students aware of what's in it for me, to give school a focus for students, a reason for every lesson and what is valuable about learning it.

Maine Vocational School Director (1997)

"Phase Outs" Pertaining to Learning and Teaching

1. **Master schedules** that lockstep every student's learning opportunities. Learning activities, to be successful, must respond to learners' and teachers' needs. Master schedules often confine activities to short, uniform periods, single-discipline curricula, and few hands-on or experiential learning opportunities that address diverse styles and paces of learning.

2. **Assigning teachers** student loads that preclude effective teaching. Teachers cannot effectively assign learning tasks and give regular feedback to students if they are responsible for over 80 students at a time.

3. **Classifying** and teaching students by a single dimension of ability or interest (tracking). Students who spend their entire secondary years in lower track homogeneous groups experience depressed aspirations, lower academic self-confidence, and limited achievement.

4. **Assessments** of learning and growth based only on grades or on forms of learning that require memorization and little application. Grade point averages (GPA), graduation honors based solely on grades as the measure of learning and growth, and transcripts that report only grades serve few educational purposes and harmfully limit everyone's understanding of achievement and success.

5. **Curricula** and learning based solely on texts and teacher-determined goals, topics, and activities. Student needs and interests and the Maine *Learning Results* must determine curriculum if that curriculum is to engage students in meaningful learning.

6. A **co-curriculum** that is seen as "extra" curriculum (community entertainment and/or fund-raisers). Instead, it should be a legitimate and essential part of students' learning experiences, with student learning goals driving its structure and the conduct of all involved.

7. **Diploma requirements** that use only Carnegie Units based on traditional grading systems. (See Core Practice #8.)

8. **Study halls** that offer no student-teacher educational interaction or true opportunity for learning.

"Phase Outs" Pertaining to School Organization

9 The six-hour **school day**, five-day **school week**, and September to June **school year**. Learning, and especially learning that incorporates the workplace and community-based projects, must occur when the best opportunities arise.

10 **Departmental structures** as the only teams that faculty belong to. Teachers need to be part of instructional teams that focus on a core group of students as well as belonging to discipline-specific groups. (See Core Practice #9.)

11 Teacher and administration **evaluation systems** that only monitor compliance with behavioral and workplace checklists. Evaluations should address performance criteria related to student learning and growth.

12 **Job descriptions** and expectations that teachers are "working" only when doing group instruction. Time for planning, authentic assessment, and conferences must be included in the teacher's work week.

13 **Non-instructional assignments** for faculty, removing professional educators from their instructional roles to "stand duty" or supervise non-instructional functions when they could be serving instructional functions. This is not an efficient use of either instructional expertise or financial resources.

14 **Faculty meetings** and structures that limit sharing of professional information and perspectives on students, instructional matters, curriculum, and educational policy. Faculty involvement in such decisions is essential to the school's effectiveness.

15 **Student and parental exclusion** from key decisions regarding their students' present and future learning opportunities. (See Core Practices #6 and #14.)

16 **"Staff development days"** planned by someone else for "your own good" and the concept that a day spent on professional growth is "a day off." Professional development must be continuous and focus on educators' learning needs – needs that, if answered, will improve the educator's ability to meet student learning needs. Educators themselves are best able to identify these needs and to plan professional development to meet them. (See Core Practice #13.)

The change in our schedule has refreshed my outlook on teaching. I actually engage my students in group discussions, require that they hold more accountability for their work, and look for new and innovative ways in which to challenge them.

Teacher comment in Cawelti (1994) pg. 32

"Phase Outs" Pertaining to District, Community, and State Support

High Schools that continue to use tracking as a technique for providing some students with a second-rate education will not have a place in the educational future that we envision.

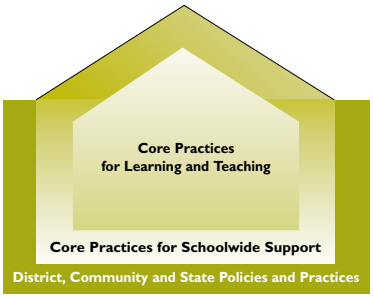
Breaking Ranks (1996) pg. 50

17 The **attitude that schools are holding tanks** for teens "not ready for life." Communities, businesses, and the state must help secondary schools become places that transition our youth into productive futures.

18 **Policies and procedures** of the school, district, and state (including negotiated contracts) that discourage creativity and collaboration among faculty, among high schools and applied technology schools, and between secondary schools and their communities. Policies and procedures must be critically scrutinized. Those that cannot be justified on educational grounds–i.e. serving student learning and the attainment of the Maine *Learning Results*–must be removed or changed immediately.

19 **Parent/school organizations** that focus on special interests and/or on fundraising for activities that have no clear educational mission or accountability framework. All activities sponsored by the school must be justifiable by the school's mission and goals. If they draw energy and resources away from the core mission, they must be discontinued or altered.

SECONDARY SCHOOLS CANNOT GO IT ALONE



THE COMMISSION'S THIRD SET OF RECOMMENDATIONS addresses the question: What needs to happen beyond the secondary school's walls in order that the Core Practices can flourish in every Maine community? Here, we turn our attention to what parent groups, school district leadership, town officials, professional associations, and state leaders must do if high schools and applied technology schools are to serve our youth more effectively.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

1 **Use this document in educational and policy-making forums statewide to conduct discussions of the question: What is our responsibility to support and to stimulate improvement in the learning experiences of high-school-age students?**

ATTENTION Every Maine School Committee; Every parent-teacher group; Commissioner of Education; State Board of Education; Maine Education Association, Maine Principals' Association, Maine State Superintendents' Association, Maine School Counselors' Association; Maine School Boards' Association, Maine Congress of Parents and Teachers; Colleges and Departments of Education; Other professional associations and community groups.

More than anything, we must place the issue of secondary school learning on all of our agendas. Historically, parents, community members, and many state leaders have shied away from direct involvement in secondary schools. Such benign neglect cannot continue. Teachers, principals, counselors, coaches, and staff need active support and critical friends if they are to institute even a fraction of the practices in this document.

Involvement begins with discussion. Appendix A, "An Invitation to Improve Learning," provides a process and materials for starting such discussions. We suggest that individuals and groups who are committed to strengthening secondary learning begin with the following two questions:

- Can we support the Commission's Core Principles for our school?
- How can we more actively share responsibility for improving learning by joining with the high school and applied technology center to implement some of the Commission's Core Practices?

The likelihood of high schools enlisting the support of the community in the cause of reform will grow to the extent that schools truly embrace members of the community as partners in the effort.

Breaking Ranks (1996) pg. 104

2 **Foster opportunities to learn for secondary educators that will prepare them to undertake these practices and sustain them through the challenges of making the practices effective.**

ATTENTION All professional associations; School district leadership; Teachers' Associations; Maine Department of Education; Maine State Board of Education; University of Maine System; Teacher preparation institutions; Professional development providers; Education Committee of the Maine Legislature.

In addition to the recommendations of Maine's Task Force on Professional Development (MDOE, 1997), we recommend the following specific steps:

- Establish annual teacher academies where teachers and faculty teams develop new teaching approaches and skills based on current research on adolescent learning and development, the content disciplines, and especially team functioning, interdisciplinary teaching, and school-to-career methods.

  (See Core Practices #2, #3, #6, #7, #9, and #12.)

- Establish annual leadership academies where principals and teacher leaders develop the new leadership approaches and skills required to mobilize others to make the difficult adaptations to practices recommended here.

  (See Core Practices #9, #10, #13, #14, and #15.)

It's much harder and requires more energy to do project-oriented, hands-on teaching. It's been left to the teachers to do it, with too little support.

Maine High School Teacher (1998)

3 Revise state and local policies that currently hamper schools from fulfilling the principles of sound education and realizing the innovative practices recommended here.

ATTENTION Local School Committees, Commissioner of Education; Education Committe of the Legislature; State Board of Education; Other professional associations; Governor; Legislature; Town/District Officials.

In particular:

- Local School Committee
  Policies pertaining to:

  - teacher job descriptions and schedules that overload teachers with students and provide too little time, space, and collaboration to permit staff to plan and follow through with learning for every student;
  - professional development and performance evaluation to make them consistent with best practices and schievement of Maine's *Learning Results*; and
  - purposes and procedures of the co-curriculum and co-curricular job descriptions, to make them address learning goals for all students.

  (See Core Practices #4, #6, #8 and #9-15.)

- Commissioner of Education; Education Committee; State Board of Education; Other professional associations
  Policies pertaining to:

- graduation requirements based on Carnegie units only;
- certification requirements that do not ensure that every educator and staff member possesses requisite skills, attitudes, and knowledge;
- school review practices to ensure their coordination with new New England Association of Schools and Colleges accreditation procedures;
- collective bargaining and tenure practices that discourage teamwork and innovation among educators and the sustenance of a talented and committed educational workforce.

(See Core Practices #2, #3, #7, #8, #11, #12, #13 and #15.)

- **Governor, Legislature, Towns/Districts:** Funding and facilities policies to assure equitable learning opportunities across all secondary schools and fund innovative practices so schools can be both effective and efficient.

(See Core Practices #3, #4, #6, #9, #10, #11 and #13.)

4 Establish business-school collaboration to provide learning opportunities beyond the school's walls in which students can learn more deeply and learn job-related skills and knowledge.

ATTENTION Local chambers of commerce and businesses; Local School Committees; Maine Coalition for Excellence in Education; Maine Development Foundation; Maine Chamber of Commerce; State agencies; Universities and Colleges.

To address learning style and career aspiration needs of our students, the community and local work-sites must become part of the educational environment for teenagers. They can, in partnership with high schools and applied technology schools, provide academic and occupational internships, school-to-career programs, and applied learning tasks such as service-learning projects.

(See Core Practices #2, #6, and #10 and, in bibliography, Cushman, Steinberg, and Riordan.)

5 Restructure pre-service education, certification, and professional development for teachers, administrators, coaches, counselors, and other staff to reflect the new recommendations of learning, teaching, and professional conduct embedded in all fifteen Core Practices.

ATTENTION Education faculties of the University of Maine System and private colleges; Maine Department of Education; Maine State Board of Education; Professional associations.

This report calls for educational personnel who understand and respect current-day adolescents, who can tailor learning activities to individual needs without compromising standards, who can accurately assess student learning and adjust their practices accordingly, and who can collaborate with parents and colleagues.

Serious secondary education requires the commitment of its students. They have to work hard; they are not merely genial empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge . . . But the schools for them have to be committed and determined too. The temptation to pass the buck is almost irresistible.

Sizer (1996) pg. 146

These new responsibilities will, for some staff, require new competencies, new knowledge, and a new disposition. These must become part of our staff preparation programs as well as our certification, evaluation, and professional development practices.

(See Core Practices #3, 6, #7, #8, #9, #12, #13, and #15.)

6 Fund innovation in Maine's high schools and applied technology schools and explore ways to reallocate existing resources so that secondary schools can adopt the Core Practices.

ATTENTION Legislature; Governor; Maine Department of Education; Local School Committees; Boards of Selectpeople/City Councils; Professional associations.

We must all learn to view the secondary school years as a purposeful transition to a productive future, not as an end in itself.

Promising Futures pg. 50

The planning required to explore and institute the Core Practices will sap the energies and tax the time and expertise of educators and parents. Schools, particularly if they have little previous experience with innovation, will need resources to fuel the innovation process.

Further, such practices as interdisciplinary teams, limiting student loads to 80, flexible scheduling, and parent involvement in students' personal learning plans may radically change people's daily patterns of activity in our schools. Resources can be creatively reallocated to make optimal use of staff, space, and time without requiring extensive new funds. To succeed at this difficult task, local and state officials must collaborate with educators in taking a hard look at all current practices and changing them where called for.

(See Core Practices #2, #6, #9, #10, and #11.)

7 Change attitudes and beliefs about the purposes of secondary schools and the nature of educators' work.

ATTENTION Parents; Community groups; Employers; State leaders; Universities and Colleges.

Parents, community groups, local employers, and educators themselves powerfully shape student expectations of themselves and their schools. We must all learn to view the secondary school years as a purposeful transition to a productive future, not as an end in itself. By expecting specific *learning results* from the high school experience and treating teenagers as maturing partners in their own preparation, we can end the dependent and sometimes mutually hostile relationships that contradict our educational aims.

Similarly, gone are the days when teachers "taught subjects" and students "learned or else". We now know much more about how teenagers learn and mature than we did even a short time ago. Teaching high school students is now a radically new venture, requiring new talents and skills and a new disposition toward youth. As teachers chart the new territory suggested by the Core Practices, the public will be called upon to understand the extensive professional development needs educators have and to change along with our staffs.

EPILOGUE

"The jean jacket should have stayed at home," thought Kevin as he stepped off the bus at Allme H.S. A snowy Maine winter had melted into mud season, dried into spring, and was exploding into full flower. Only two weeks separated Kevin from his summer vacation and, after that, his senior year.

Like most days, Kevin quickly stopped by his locker and grabbed what he needed for the day. Unlike September, Kevin now only removed materials for half of his classes; the school had changed to block scheduling at mid-year and only half of Kevin's classes met each day. The principal, Mrs. Alden, had announced the change before Christmas. Most students, Kevin included, were not surprised by the change as the Student Council had been an actve part of most conversations regarding the proposed changes and had kept the student body informed through the school newspaper.

"Hey, Kevin, were you able to stop by that cemetery on your way home last night?" called Linda as she ran to catch him. "Were there any 'Cummings'?"

"Yeah, I found another group," replied Kevin. "It looks like one family with two parents, a grandmother, and three kids, although it looked like there are several unused spaces. The stones were pretty worn, but I was able to get a couple of grave rubbings."

Kevin pulled out several sheets of paper covered by charcoal revealing names and dates of six people.

"Great! We've only got two known cemeteries left to check. I talked last night to Mr. Gagne at the historical society. They're excited about the family research we're doing. I'm nervous, about how we're going to share everything we've found out during our final exam."

"Should we conduct class out in the hallway or in here?" asked their U.S. History teacher, Mr. Potter, standing at the classroom door.

"I guess inside," laughed Kevin walking in.

The class passed quickly as small groups of students shared information on various families from the town's history. At mid-year, Mr. Potter had slowly begun moving the classwork out of the History text. Currently, Kevin and his classmates used the text to help place local events in the national historical picture. Instead of studying U.S. History in broad general terms, the class had explored it in light of local events. The final exam was a presentation by each group to the local historical society, including written documentation, videos, pictures, and audio tapes. Class ended with Linda and Nicole agreeing to visit the final two cemeteries that afternoon, with Kevin and Jeremy visiting 86-year-old Peter Cummings to see if he knew anything about the new group of names.

After finishing a lab in Chemistry class, Kevin hurried to his Art class. Three weeks earlier the class had organized a museum display of their work over a three day period. In addition to displaying the semester's work, each student had conducted a workshop on his or her efforts. Both students and parents participated. Mrs. Juniper had considered that as the final exam, even though she had scheduled it a month before the end of school to avoid overwhelming her students at the end of the year. The students had spent the past few weeks either reworking a piece or creating a new piece of art based on feedback received from the museum presentation. Kevin was finishing a series of photographs originally inspired by his work in U.S. History class, while other students had been throwing pots, drawing, painting, and even creating a video.

"No need to hurry," thought Kevin as the lunch bell rang. As part of the schedule change, the students had lobbied for a single, longer, lunch. Students no longer ate in just the cafeteria, but used eight classrooms and, for the last month, picnic tables outside.

"I don't know if I'll like this advisory thing for next year," said Lauren to four other students at the table as Kevin sat down. "What are they going to do?"

"It sounds fine to me," replied Chris. "As I see it, it gives us a chance to settle in for the day. My mom is excited because she'll be able to call a single person here at the school to get more information about my work and about the school. I'm not too excited about that piece, but I can live with it."

"It'll probably be fine, but what about our lockers? They'll all be gone this summer," replied Lauren.

"My knapsack never fit in it anyway," answered Kevin. "It makes more sense to me to have a desk of my own. I'm still a little confused about how these teams are going to work, but if it gives me my own space, I'll take it."

"The way I understand it," replied Jared, "each grade will be randomly split in half. Then those 75 kids will be taught by the same four teachers in English, Math, Science and History. We'll still get to take Art or French during another period. It gives classes the chance to meet for as much time as the projects need, and a place to keep our projects. Because we won't be shifting among so many groups, it gives us all a desk. I'm excited about something different."

The conversation continued as Kevin got up to go to Algebra II, where Mr. Parker continued to juggle at least three textbooks, and kids continued to make connections with their lives.

When school ended, Kevin met up with Jeremy to go visit Peter Cummings. Armed with a tape recorder, the two left for the short walk to his old farmhouse. They would be back in time to catch the late bus at 3:30. A local business had helped fund a late bus every day, and having seen it used, the school board had agreed to fund it the following year. Focused and excited by the prospect of learning from live people instead of just books, Kevin and Jeremy started down the road. ■

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

AN INVITATION TO IMPROVE LEARNING: SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THIS REPORT

THE MAINE COMMISSION ON SECONDARY EDUCATION invites educators, students, parents, and communities to join in the effort to improve Maine's secondary schools. Improving schools involves engaging each school community in rich dialogue about the meaning of a good education. This document is designed to stimulate such dialogue, with the idea that no two good schools need to look alike.

However, the Core Practices recommended by the Commission are grounded in research and the work of our nation's best thinkers in education reform. They are practices which we believe would support all students achieving the ambitious learning standards set forth by the state in the Maine *Learning Results*. By discussing these practices, each school district can bring this document to life, and encourage each community to improve the learning, personal development, and career preparation of all their secondary students.

We invite you to convene groups in your school community to talk about the secondary education experiences of your youth. Each section of our report provides ideas and proposals for you to explore as you design improvements at your high school and applied technology center or school. Here we offer a process for you to use as you begin your important work.

***Dialogue increases a group's understanding of the ideas presented without moving toward debate. The report is an invitation for Maine's communities to* begin the dialogue.**

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A Process for Sharing and Talking about the Report

1 THE PURPOSE

There are three main purposes of this report:

- To help readers understand the pressing needs of secondary students;
- To increase understanding of the current reality of the Maine secondary school experience;
- To offer a set of Core Principles and Core Practices for schools and communities to use as a basis for dialogue and school renewal.

2 ORGANIZING THE DIALOGUE

We choose the word dialogue because it implies talking without moving toward decision or debate. It is critical for people to be able to talk about the big ideas presented in this report in an open, safe setting. Discussion implies talking toward decision or conclusion. Dialogue increases a group's understanding of the ideas presented without moving toward debate. The report is an invitation for Maine's communities to begin the dialogue.

While this report pushes schools toward reform in all aspects of the learning environment, we recognize the difficulty of trying to grasp the ideas in one sitting. We suggest talking about one section at a time, in a small group format, using the guidelines for a text-based seminar as a format for the dialogue.

Text-Based Seminar Guidelines

Purpose: Enlargement of understanding of a text, not the achievement of some particular understanding.

A. Group members read a section of the report before meeting.

B. Establish the following ground rules for the discussion:

- Listen actively.
- Build on what others say.
- Don't step on others' talk. Silence and pauses are OK.
- Converse honestly–there is no need to go through the facilitator.
- Let the conversation flow as much as possible without raising hands or using a speaker's list.
- Expose/suspend your assumptions.
- Emphasize clarification, amplification, implications of ideas.
- Refer to the text; challenge others to go to the text.
- Watch your own air time–both in terms of how often you speak, and in terms of how much you say when you speak.

C. Conclude the 1-2 hour dialogue with a written summary of "ideas that could work in our school."

3 TALKING ABOUT THE REPORT

A. The Prologue

This story personalizes the report. It is a beginning which challenges the readers to think about their own school experiences.

Suggestions for groups: Read the prologue together. Talk about personal stories and how you felt. How is the story like our school? How is it different?

B. Call to Action

Guiding questions for groups: What is our response to the call for reform? What are the concerns and struggles among our students and faculty? How do our students measure up on a national and international scale? What challenges do we face if we are to significantly reform our secondary schools?

C. Public Education in Maine in 1998: An Overview

A picture of the current reality of Maine's secondary schools offers a context for beginning the dialogue with school boards and communities.

Does this picture of public education in Maine represent the current reality in your community? In what ways? Of the eight observations and challenges presented, which are of particular interest or concern in your school? What do students say about this "current reality"? For a more detailed description, see Appendix B, "The Current State of Public Secondary Education in Maine: The View from 1998" by Gordon Donaldson, Commission Co-Chair and Professor of Education at the University of Maine.

D. The Core Principles

The Core Principles are the guiding beliefs supporting the Commission's recommendations.

In what ways do these Core Principles support the mission/vision/belief statements in your school? What would these principles look like in practice? How would school look and feel different?

Use of the text-based seminar protocol would be particularly useful in talking about the Core Principles. Each Principle provides an opening for rich dialogue around the meaning and purpose of schooling. One idea would be to begin each faculty, board, or PTA meeting with a dialogue around one Principle. Groups could then go to the Core Practices which describe actions to be taken to fulfill the vision of the Principle.

A short form of the Core Principles and a copy of the Maine *Learning Results'* guiding principles are included on the following pages for photocopying.

E. The Core Practices

The fifteen recommendations for school renewal are organized in two nested categories. Begin the dialogue with the first eight Core Practices around teaching and learning. Core Practices nine through fifteen address the school structures, organization and support systems necessary to accomplish the first eight.

Note the references cited which support the Core Principles and Practices. Groups wanting to dig deeper into the ideas or to find supporting evidence will find the suggested readings helpful. Another way to move the dialogue is to provide groups with a selection of readings around one of the Core Practices.

A summary of the fifteen Core Practices is included in the following pages for photocopying.

F. Practices To Phase Out

While schools are continuously asked to embrace new ideas, they have a difficult time letting go of the "old" ways of doing business. What would you like to see phased out in your school? What doesn't work anymore? Are there practices or traditions which do not support your central purpose or mission?

Affectionately termed "the junk yard" early in the Commission's work, these are practices which we consider to be no longer useful in secondary schools if we are to be free to fulfill the Core Principles described in the report. The "Phase Out" section is a place where many groups may be tempted to move from dialogue to debate. The traditions of the secondary institution need to be seriously challenged if we are to fulfill the promise of providing the world class education which every Maine student deserves.

G. Schools Cannot Go It Alone

If our secondary schools are going to change, they must be supported and assisted by communities and the state. How do district policies and town or city procedure make it difficult to institute the Core Practices? How does the contract negotiated with teachers affect implementation? And what about certification, graduation requirements, and other state laws and rules? How does the funding picture impact the entire school improvement process?

Engage in dialogue over the seven recommendations in this section. Try to include as many participants from the "Attention" section as possible.

MAINE COMMISSION ON SECONDARY EDUCATION

CORE PRINCIPLES

(Short form)

The Maine Commission on Secondary Education believes that successful secondary educational experiences require:

1. **a safe, respectful, and caring environment** that assures that every student can attend fully to her or his central mission: learning;

2. adults to hold **high universal expectations of all students** and to provide a **variety of pathways** for students as they strive to meet these expectations;

3. **frequent assessment of student learning** and reviews of these assessments among students, teachers, and parents so that all can **share responsibility for planning and carrying out** learning activities;

4. teaching and procedures that **honor and build upon the unique contributions and needs of each learner** so that all students will make full use of their opportunities to learn;

5. staff, parents, and especially **students to be engaged democratically in decisions about learning and the conduct of the school** so they learn civic responsibility and skills and so that respect and equity are assured among all members of the school community; and

6. **internal coherence among school mission, goals, actions, and outcomes** so that the efforts of students, staff and community result in the fulfillment of mission and goals.

July, 1998

MAINE COMMISSION ON SECONDARY EDUCATION

SUMMARY OF CORE PRACTICES

Core Practices for Learning and Teaching

1. Every student is respected and valued by adults and by fellow students.
2. Every teacher tailors learning experiences to the learner's needs, interests, and future goals.
3. Every teacher challenges learners both to master the fundamentals of the disciplines and to integrate skills and concepts across the disciplines to address relevant issues and problems.
4. Every student learns in collaborative groups of students with diverse learning styles, skills, ages, personal backgrounds and career goals.
5. Every student makes informed choices about education and participation in school life and takes responsibility for the consequences of those choices.
6. Every student employs a personal learning plan to target individual as well as common learning goals and to specify learning activities that will lead to the attainment of those goals.
7. Every teacher makes learning standards, activities, and assessment procedures known to students and parents and assures the coherence among them.
8. Every student who receives the secondary school diploma has demonstrated, through performance exhibitions, knowledge and skills at a level deemed by the school and by the state to be sufficient to begin adult life.

Core School Practices to Support Learning

9. Students and teachers belong to teams that provide each student continuous personal and academic attention and a supportive environment for learning and growth.
10. Learning governs the allocation of time, space, facilities, and services.
11. Every teacher has sufficient time and resources to learn, to plan, and to confer with individual students, colleagues, and families.
12. Every staff member understands adolescent learning and developmental needs, possesses diverse instructional skills, and is a constructive model for youth.
13. Every school has a comprehensive professional development system in which every staff member has a professional development plan to guide improvement.
14. Staff, students, and parents are involved democratically in significant decisions affecting student learning.
15. Active leadership by principals and others inspires and mobilizes staff, students, and parents to work toward the fulfillment of the school's mission and, within it, their own learning and life goals.

July 1998

MAINE *LEARNING RESULTS*

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Each Maine student must leave school as:

I A Clear and Effective Communicator

- uses oral, written, visual, artistic, and technological modes of expression;
- reads, listens to and interprets messages from multiple sources; and
- uses English and at least one other language.

II A Self-Directed and Life-Long Learner

- creates career and education plans that reflect personal goals, interests and skills, and available resources;
- demonstrates the capacity to undertake independent study; and
- finds and uses information from libraries, electronic data bases, and other resources.

III A Creative and Practical Problem Solver

- observes situations objectively to clearly and accurately define problems;
- frames questions and designs data collection and analysis strategies from all disciplines to answer those questions;
- identifies patterns, trends, and relationships that apply to solutions to problems; and
- generates a variety of solutions, builds a case for the best response, and critically evaluates the effectiveness of this response.

IV A Responsible and Involved Citizen

- recognizes the power of personal participation to affect the community and demonstrates participation skills;
- understands the importance of accepting responsibility for personal decisions and actions;
- knows the means of achieving personal and community health and well-being; and
- recognizes and understands the diverse nature of society.

V A Collaborative and Quality Worker

- knows the structure and functions of the labor market;
- assesses individual interests, aptitudes, skills, and values in relation to demands of the workplace; and
- demonstrates reliability, flexibility, and concern for quality.

VI An Integrative and Informed Thinker

- applies knowledge and skills in and across English language arts, visual and performing arts, foreign languages, health and physical education, mathematics, science, social studies, and career preparation; and
- comprehends relationships among different modes of thought and methods associated with the traditional disciplines.

July 1998

APPENDIX B

THE CURRENT STATE OF PUBLIC SECONDARY EDUCATION IN MAINE

The View from 1998

by Gordon Donaldson, University of Maine

THE COMMISSION'S FIRST GOAL was to take stock of the current condition of secondary education in the state. We began by placing students at the heart of our examination. We asked, "How are Maine's 15 to 19 year olds experiencing their time in school? How are they benefiting from it? Not benefiting from it?"

We learned a lot from the testimony of students, educators, and citizens and from what little statistical information exists. It sent us to the schools themselves and to the communities that surround them to explore how school practices and structures and community and family influences were shaping adolescents' educational experiences. Here, too, we found that we often had to rely on testimony and anecdote because no central, systematically collected pool of data existed. (The bulk of our historical and demographic data came from *Maine School Reports*, annual summaries from the MDOE, and the Center for Educational Statistics, USDE.)

Between June 1997 and May 1998, we collected information about secondary school students, their schools, and their communities. We repeatedly examined these data on the "current reality" in order to identify those aspects of our system that seemed to work well and those that did not. From our observations, the Commission fashioned its Core Principles and Core Practices for the improvement of Maine's secondary schools.

We offer the following summary of basic data and the Commission's observations with our encouragement to use it to ask, "Does our school fit this description?" and "How can we learn more about our students and our school and use what we learn to plan improvement?"

A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF OUR SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS

In 1998, nearly all of Maine's 116 public secondary schools and 10 "public" private academies serve geographically distinct territories defined by school districts or tuition agreements. Similarly, 27 secondary applied technology schools serve students from geographic clusters of high schools.

These 153 schools constitute the lowest number of secondary schools in Maine since the 1880s. In general, these schools are more distant from students' homes and home communities than was the case before 1960. Not only are Maine's secondary schools governed by districts and school boards more separated from the typical citizen, but parents have considerably less access to their children's high school teachers and experiences as well.

THE SCHOOLS

- 116 Public High Schools (including 15 7-12 schools and 9 K-12 schools)
- 10 Private Academies with over 60% public tuition enrollments
- 27 Secondary Applied Technology Centers/Region Schools

. . . [Maine high schools] are more distant from students' homes and home communities than was the case before 1960 . . . parents have considerably less access to their children's high school teachers and experiences as well.

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- 6 (at least) Public Alternative Schools serving students in grades 9-12
- 9 (at least) Private Religiously Affiliated Schools serving students in grades 9-12
- 8 Private Non-Sectarian Secondary Schools
- 7 Schools Serving Special Populations (including grades 9-12, among others)

Counting only the Public High Schools and the 10 "Public" Private Schools,

- the majority of the state's schools are located in the most rural counties of Western, Northern, and Eastern Maine;
- the average enrollment in 1994 was 492 (12th lowest in the U.S.);
- the pupil:teacher ratio in the mid-1990s was about 13 pupils for each teacher (including all instructional staff, such as Gifted and Talented and Special Education); and
- the average secondary per pupil expenditure in 1995-6 was $4,758 (elementary p.p.e. – $3,487).

Average statewide 11th grade scores on the Maine Educational Assessment test increased in all six subject areas.

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OUR SECONDARY STUDENTS

In 1997, 73,920 Maine youth, or roughly 5% of the state's population, were enrolled in secondary education. Of this group, approximately 98% were Caucasian, 0.9% Asian/Pacific Origins, 0.6% American Indian, and 0.5% African American (based on breakdown of 0-19 year old population). These youth distributed among our secondary schools as follows:

- 76% attended public high schools;
- 10% attended private high schools;
- 12% attended applied technology centers/region schools; and
- 1% of the group were receiving home schooling.

Programmatically, in 1997:

- 12% were receiving Special Education; and
- 7% were receiving education for the Gifted and Talented.

ACHIEVEMENT DATA in the 1990s:

- Maine students, on average, scored at the national average on the SAT Verbal test and just 10 points below the national average on the SAT Quantitative test, despite having 65% of eligible students taking the test (vs. 42% nationally);
- Average statewide 11th grade scores on the Maine Educational Assessment test increased in all six subject areas; and
- Gaps between boys' and girls' math and science MEA scores narrowed although the gender gap in reading remained substantial.

COMPLETION DATA during the 1990s:

- 81-84% of students enrolling in grade 9 received a high school diploma four years later (the highest percentage in our history);

- the annual dropout rate has remained between 3 and 4% among secondary students;
- in 1990, Maine ranked 8th in the U.S. in percentage of 20- year-olds holding high school diplomas and 19th in the U.S. in percentage of 20-54 year olds earning high school diplomas (87%);
- increasing numbers of Mainers who have not graduated from secondary school are completing the General Education Diploma through Adult Education programs;
- approximately 60% of June graduates planned to matriculate in post-secondary institutions (matching the state's highest rates); and
- in 1990, Maine ranked 35th nationally in percentage of 20-54 year olds earning bachelor's degrees (20%).

OBSERVATIONS ON THE PRESENT: CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

The Commission's fourteen month review of the current condition of Maine's secondary education system led to eight major observations. These served to focus the needs assessment phase of the Commission's work, helping to develop the Core Principles that shaped our recommendations. Although these eight observations and their attendant challenges do not address every important need facing secondary schools, the Commission believes that addressing the needs described below must be a central part of any effort to improve the quality of learning for Maine's youth.

1 Maine schools are graduating the highest proportion of eligible students in the state's history.

Maine's public secondary school system successfully graduates the highest percentage of Maine youth in its history: about 80% of each grade 8 cohort. By contrast, the graduation rate in 1943 was 43% and in 1963 was 63%. Approximately 12% of today's graduates attend applied technology center programs as part of their public high school experience.

Of the 20% of each grade 8 cohort that does not graduate from a public Maine high school, the number attending private schools (currently 10%) and receiving home-schooling (currently 1%) has risen in recent years while the number dropping out has declined (current annual rate: 3%).

The Challenge: To continue to diversify educational options so that all Maine youth can reach high levels of learning before exiting the public educational system.

Maine's public secondary school system successfully graduates the highest percentage of Maine youth in its history: about 80% of each grade 8 cohort. By contrast, the graduation rate in 1943 was 43% and in 1963 was 63%.

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2 Secondary school students exhibit more varied and complex learning, social, and emotional needs than in the past.

Our system's success at keeping students in school has increased the variety of students attending classes in our public secondary schools. In the past 25 years, programming for exceptional children has been introduced, providing special funds and specialized teaching for youth with learning challenges (currently 12% of secondary enrollments) and with identified learning "gifts and talents" (currently 7% of secondary enrollments). The numbers of students identified has been increasing.

In addition, reports from secondary teachers, counselors, and administrators

In addition, reports from secondary teachers, counselors, and administrators indicate marked increases in the number of students enrolling in public schools who demonstrate social and emotional distress.

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indicate marked increases in the number of students enrolling in public schools who demonstrate social and emotional distress. Typically, these students have little adult guidance outside of school, are transient and perhaps living independently, and find it difficult to adhere to academic and organizational regimens. These trends are supported by data collected by the Maine Children's Alliance that demonstrate rising rates of teen arrests, teen involvement in violent activity, teens not living with a parent, and until 1992, of teen suicide (see Kids Count reports, 1992-98).

The Challenges:

- To develop ways of meeting the needs of special and distressed populations that do not overtax the human, programmatic, and fiscal resources of our secondary schools;
- To develop programs and practices for the majority of students not requiring special services, a population whose achievement and development has increasingly been neglected.

3 Every Maine student does not have equal access to learning in comparison to other students in his or her school.

This leaves, however, gnawing uncertainties about the level of resources and quality of learning for "the average" majority.

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The growing emphasis and resource support for specialized programming for special populations in the past 30 years – those seeking vocational training, those with exceptional learning talents and needs, for example – has greatly improved the learning and development of these populations. They join the "top track kids" to constitute the Maine youth who appear to "get the most" from their public high school experiences. This leaves, however, gnawing uncertainties about the level of resources and quality of learning for "the average" majority. These students tend to be in the largest classes and, as a 1996 National Agenda report put it, spend their four years of high school "getting by" with minimal effort and modest achievement in comparison to their abilities.

Accompanying this fundamental inequity, the Commission heard evidence, often anecdotal, of two other forms of inequity: gender and social. The highest GPA's in many high schools are obtained by girls (and the percentages of girls attending and finishing college are slightly higher than the percentages of boys). Gender differences continue to exist in MEA test scoring patterns as well. Although the gap between boys and girls in math and science scores has narrowed, in 1997 the gap in reading scores remained wide at the advanced and distinguished levels. Socially, many students attending Forums and interviewed in schools cite the tracking and "cliquishness" of high schools as forces that marginalize and devalue some students. Social perceptions and self-perceptions powerfully affect students' willingness and ability to challenge themselves academically.

The Challenges:

- To equip every school to investigate the patterns of achievement among its students on a regular basis and to use the results to bring greater attention and services to those students performing below the common standards described in the Maine *Learning Results*;
- To address the stereotypic thinking among educators, students, and communities in Maine that subverts the opportunities of students to attain their potential and to aspire to a wide range of futures.

4 Academic achievement is, on average, high but uneven from school to school.

While no national comparison of the achievement of all secondary students exists, the closest measure available is the College Entrance Examination (SAT). Annually, about 65% of Maine high school graduates take the SAT (compared to 42% nationally). Despite the significantly larger numbers of Maine students taking the test, their average scores have consistently been at the national average on the Verbal test and slightly below the national average on the Quantitative test.

Students' performance on the 11th grade Maine Educational Assessment (MEA) shows steady improvement since 1986 (the first year of the test) in all six content areas. However, major disparities exist among school averages and these differences have persisted for a decade (Maine Educational Policy Institute analyses).

. . . major disparities exist among school MEA averages and these differences have persisted for a decade.

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The Challenges:

- To provide conditions for students, educators, and parents in all Maine communities that will give all students equal opportunities to meet Maine's learning standards and their own personal learning goals;
- To develop sufficient data to monitor annually the performance of secondary students and the resource and program commitments in each secondary school so that cross-school comparisons can serve as valid bases for planning and decisions.

5 Students and, to a degree, staff in Maine secondary schools view educational experiences as irrelevant or disengaging for many students.

Students attending the Commission's Forums and who were interviewed in their schools were concerned that what teachers taught and expected them to learn often seemed "irrelevant" and disconnected from the "real world". Contributing to this were the varied subjects in each student's course load, the brevity of class periods, and the dependency on textbooks and lecture for instruction. Students and teachers alike reported that "hands-on" learning and interdisciplinary studies were impossible in the current schedule and structure of most high schools. Applied technology centers and the many schools exploring longer class periods ("block" plans) reported greater success in truly engaging students in "deeper" learning.

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Contributing to the feeling that formal learning did not "make sense" was the prevalence of multiple-choice assessment practices. Students feel great pressure to get good grades; grades and a high rank in class are their ticket to further education and possibly more lucrative employment. They have no choice but to emphasize in their learning what the teacher tests for. Teachers, many of whom carry student loads in excess of 100 students, give quizzes and tests that require memorization and recall largely because they are more quickly corrected and result in a defensible numerical ranking of students. Students, teachers, and principals attested to the negative impacts of this educational Catch 22.

The Challenges:

- To provide learning experiences to students that authentically engage them in learning that has value for them;

- To structure our assessment practices to reinforce rather than undercut these truer forms of learning;
- To structure our schools so that teachers, students, and parents make meaningful decisions in the student's learning journey.

High schools, some parents told the Commission, are uninviting; hectic schedules, harried teachers and principals, and even their own children appear to conspire against their participation in school matters.

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6 Maine students feel disengaged from serious decisions about their own education, about school life, and about their futures; many parents share these feelings.

While many Maine high school students appear to enjoy going to high school, few feel that they are treated as maturely as they believe they should be. Data from the Forums, school visits, and NEASC school climate surveys demonstrate the fondness many students have for their peers, some of their teachers, and particularly the social opportunities offered by their schools (UMCOEHD Center for Research and Evaluation). But Maine high school students, as well, do not feel that their schools regard them as responsible or trustworthy when it comes to decisions about their own learning, their behavior, or matters of school governance. In short, as one student put it, "[most adults here] are more interested in the rules than they are in us".

Parents of Maine students reflect a similar sentiment. In climate surveys for the NEASC self-study process, parents report that they are not as involved in their children's school experiences as they would like to be. High schools, some parents told the Commission, are uninviting; hectic schedules, harried teachers and principals, and even their own children appear to conspire against their participation in school matters.

The Challenges:

- To develop means through which students and their parents can make important decisions about future goals and current educational activities;
- To involve students and parents in important decisions that shape the school environment, governance of student life, and other arenas in which students can learn the important responsibilities and skills of democratic citizenship.

. . . in 1975, 75% went to Maine colleges; in 1995, only 55% did. Anecdotal evidence suggests not only that Maine youth are attracted by the "differentness" of out-of-state experiences but also that they believe that leaving Maine will expand their future employment and living opportunities.

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7 The highest percentage of graduates in Maine's history is accepted at higher education institutions but their rate of completion is no better than the national average and many have little confidence in the value of higher education.

About 60% of high school graduates are leaving high schools having been accepted by a post-secondary institution (nearly identical to the national rate). Graduates are increasingly attending schools outside of Maine: in 1975, 75% went to Maine colleges; in 1995, only 55% did. Anecdotal evidence suggests not only that Maine youth are attracted by the "differentness" of out-of-state experiences but also that they believe that leaving Maine will expand their future employment and living opportunities. Indeed, the availability and pay scales of jobs is cited as one reason for migration out of Maine and from rural counties to Southern Maine counties (Bangor Daily News, 3/98).

The experience of Mainers in Maine public colleges tells a dismaying story about access to and the perceived value of higher education. Indeed, in 1990 only 26% of Maine adults 20-54 years old held bachelor's or graduate

Appendix B

degrees, while 26% more held an associate's degree. From the limited data available from the UMS system, it appears that, while many youth begin a college education at a UMS campus, fewer than 35% graduate in four years and about 60% finish in six years; considerable numbers simply stop attending altogether (UM/USM Offices of Institutional Research).

Regarding Maine Technical Colleges, students and counselors report difficulty obtaining admission directly from high school; students feel forced either to take a job locally or attend a "regular" college. Only 32% of Maine Technical College students were admitted from high school in 1996; the mean age of admittees that year was 27 (MTC System). The prevalent question asked by parents and students alike is: "Why would I want to go into debt for all that tuition if I don't believe the education is going to get me a better job here in Maine?"

Many secondary students express confusion and doubt about their future options and possibilities. In contrast to seeing clear "crossroads" choices before them, today's youth feel caught on a highway rotary, spinning dizzily past possibility after possibility. At a time when adults express concern about our economy and loudly criticize the very schools our youth attend, Maine youngsters have even less reason to feel certain about whether they can "hack it" in whatever job might be available when they emerge from the educational system. This condition is deeply disconcerting for our 17 and 18-year-olds.

The Challenges:

- To provide continuous personal, academic, and career services throughout the transitional years of secondary and higher education so that every Maine youth can make informed and reasoned decisions about her or his future;
- To integrate and coordinate the public secondary and higher education systems to provide choices to all graduates of secondary schools that will lead, with reasonable assurances of success at an affordable price, to gainful employment and productive citizenship.

8 Maine high schools serve diffuse purposes and struggle to succeed at them all.

Maine's 126 public and public/private high schools try to "do it all". They are academic learning centers, conduits to vocational training, environments for adolescent development, opportunities to nurture athletic, musical, dramatic, and other talents, providers of community entertainment and identity, regional centers for adult education, and much more. Over the years, they have become more removed from individual communities as they have consolidated into larger and larger institutions with more specialized services and functions. The central mission of developing all Maine youths' intellectual and social competencies has often become blurred by the multitude of other agendas that descend on our high schools daily.

The structure of the comprehensive high school invites this "disintegration" of mission. Departmental divisions and disciplinary specialties carve faculty and curriculum into islands. Schedules and architecture divide students and adults, routinize activities, and weaken the sense of individual control and efficacy. The sheer size of some high schools makes them depersonalized; policies and practices are of necessity "designed for the average" and demand

The experience of Mainers in Maine public colleges tells a dismaying story about access to and the perceived value of higher education.

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In contrast to seeing clear "crossroads" choices before them, today's youth feel caught on a highway rotary, spinning dizzily past possibility after possibility.

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conformity to the mediocre. Students report that, against this backdrop, the most important and longlasting effects of high school are the "teachers who care about us" and the "stuff that happens outside of class" (CSE Forums; interviews).

The Challenges:

- To focus the primary resources and energies of every Maine secondary school on its central mission: learning;
- To provide strong leadership in our secondary schools in order that the social, athletic, cultural, and behavioral activities of each Maine school serve this central mission in a coherent fashion.

The central mission of developing all Maine youths' intellectual and social competencies has often become blurred by the multitude of other agendas that descend on our high schools daily.

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Students report that, against this backdrop, the most important and longlasting effects of high school are the "teachers who care about us" and the "stuff that happens outside of class."

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APPENDIX C

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To obtain copies of ***Promising Futures*** or inquire about secondary education improvement in Maine, please contact:

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Promising Futures

A Call to Improve Learning for Maine's Secondary Students

Students and educators, in general, described Maine secondary schools that are academically focused but rarely exciting or challenging, social but strangely impersonal and sometimes hostile, orderly but ill-suited for learning, predictable but lacking application to life.

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This document, therefore, is not a set of mandates or requirements. It is instead an invitation to understand the need for change and a call to take up the challenge of school improvement.

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MAINE COMMISSION ON SECONDARY EDUCATION

MAINE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Augusta, Maine

September 1998